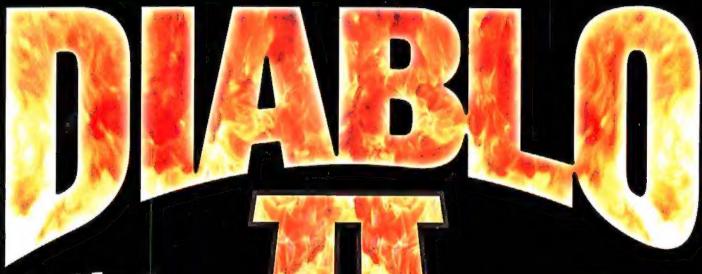


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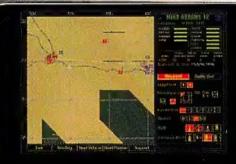
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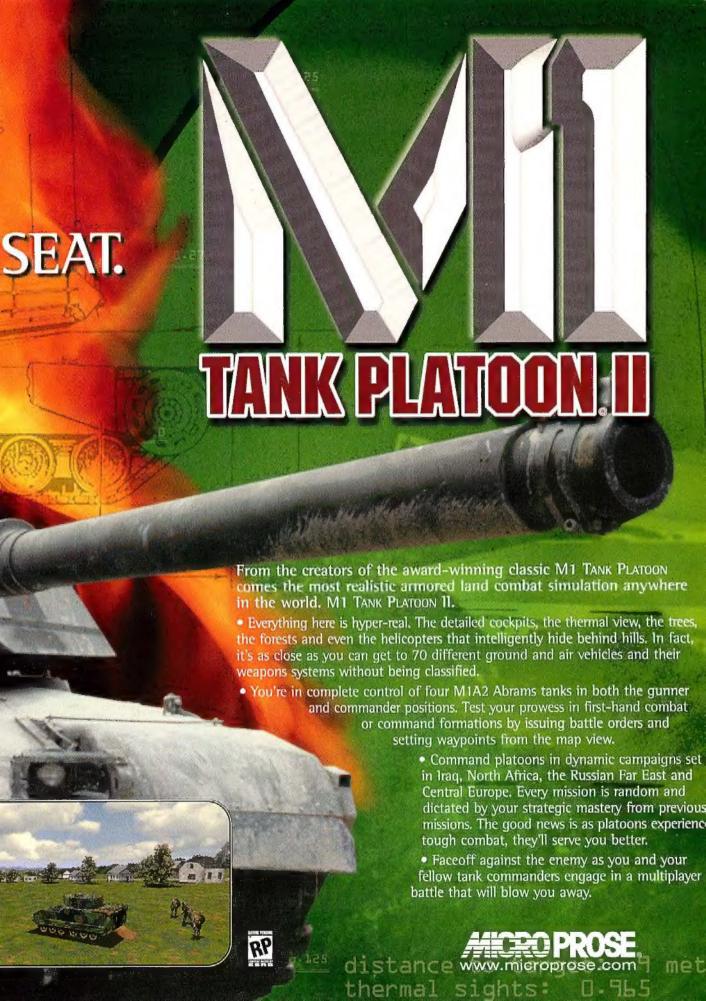
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AND YOU'VE GOT A FIRON I ROW









Bughes/kally or day/night optical rangefinder, variou computer Stelling 1. (SISO) - 3 out htmakes/Kollawrae 情的地位的特别是自由的自由500。 1 AMERICAN SERVICE OF THE WILL OF THE the Year a state with both the on transco specific mana 45 main 17 kg and ander porter emilionists trop fording 22 the Militaul preparation and 1 0 ft (2.3 5 m with proparation, dischene 60% and a slope of 9 vertical obsidere a 08th or 244 m 274 sh to a no clearance a ran 40 40 GO TO #191 @ www.computergaming.com/infolink

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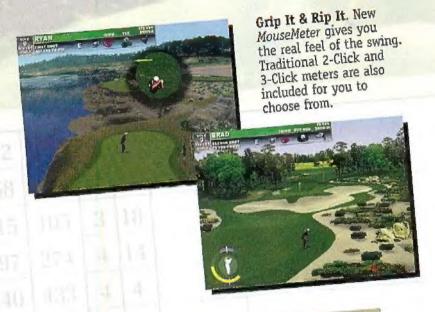
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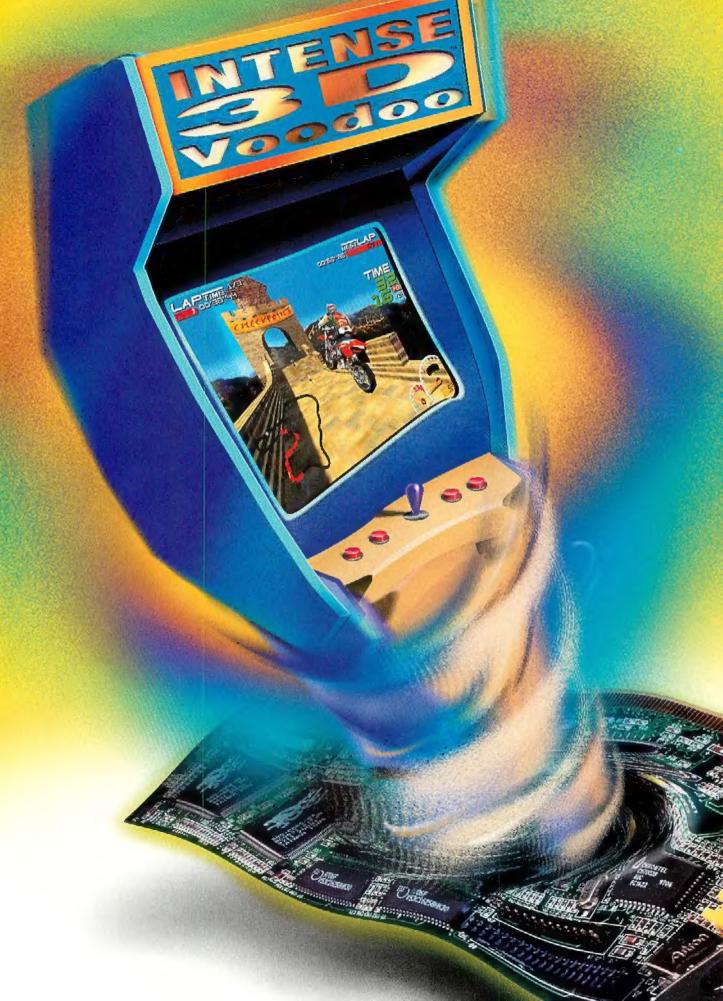


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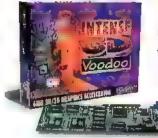
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Conquer the galaxy through military action, diplomacy or povert operations. With Star Wars Rebellion, those are just a few of the ways to implement strategy. and tactice on a grand scale - with control of the Star Wars galaxy as the prize Command the Rebei Alliance or the Galactic Empire. Engage in spectacular battles. Earn the loyalty (or resentment) of some 200 planets: Play in real-time, in single play mode or two player mode over a network, the Internet or alrest connect the Force with you? Discover for yourself.













COVER STORY

Pramiere

DIABLO

What better cure for the 88 winter blues than the red-hot fires of this sequel to CGW's 1996 Game of the Year?

> Our own Dark Elf, Elliott Chin, descends into Hell's Kitchen to find out how Blizzard plans to add more RPG elements, while keeping the action as fast and furious as the original.



BUILD YOUR DREAM MACHINE

88

DIABLO fans aren't the only ones condemned to hell. We all face the nightmarish prospect of upgrading our rigs every few years. This month



we offer three different paths to peak performance. Regardless of your budget, we'll show you how to build a gaming dynamo, whether you're upgrading or starting from scratch.

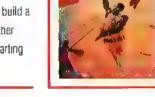
PC SPORTS SPECIAL SECTION

Whether your sports fantasies consist of robbing Wayne Gretzky of a sure goal, stamming on Shaq, or even gambing on 4th and-goal against the Steel Curtain, you're sure to find some sat

isfaction here. Join coach Jeff Green and his all star team as they separate the contenders from the prelenders in PC sports.



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ACT LOCALLY - KILL

NAME: Douglas McClure

HOMETOWN: Kokomo, IN

RANK IN NET FIGHTER: 1st

DEGREES EARNED: 235,000,

traded 27,500 to buy Quake™ in the HEAT store

66 I USED TO SMILE AND HAND PEOPLE THEIR FRENCH FRIES, SECRETLY IMAGINING A GIANT TARGET ON EACH ONE'S CHEST AS THEY WALKED TO THE KETCHUP STAND. AFTER I PLAYED OTHERS ON HEAT.NET'S NET FIGHTER, I FELT BETTER AND SUDDENLY ALL THE TARGETS DISAPPEARED! 99

REAT USER NAME: reniu

TOURNAMENT RECORD: 12-2

FAVORITE SPECIAL MOVE:

swinging knife decapitation

TRASH TALK EXCERPT:

"Now that's what you call a superclose shave!"

OTHER FAVORITE GAMES ON NEATMET:

Quake," Hexen II," Outlaws," Diablo," WarCraft II"



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LOCALLY—get the HEAT internet game network box at your local computer store! GLOBALL you can divert your anger off the streets and onto the net against real, live peop

GLOBALLY ON HEAT. NET!



NAME: Bill Shultz

HOMETOWN: Portsmouth, VA

BANK IN NET FIGHTER: 2nd

DEGREES EARNED: 197,500, traded 17,500 to buy Scud: Industrial Evolution™in the HEAT store

66 I USED TO TAKE OUT MY
BULLETS, AND ON EACH ONE I
WOULD WRITE THE NAME OF EACH
PERSON ON MY BUS. THEN A
FRIEND SHOWED ME I COULD
PURGE MY VIOLENT URGES IN
MET FIGHTER ON HEAT.NET
AGAINST OTHER PEOPLE. THANKS
TO HEAT, THE PEOPLE ON MY BUS
WILL NEVER KNOW HOW CLOSE
THEY CAME! 99

HEAT USER NAME: thunderhammer

TOURNAMENT RECORD: 9-3

FAVORITE SPECIAL MOVE

forked lightning kick

TRASH TALK EXCERPT: "Stop hitting

like a sissy girl!"

OTHER FAVORITE CAMES ON NEAT.NET:

Blood, Duke Nukem, Total Annihilation, Shadow Warrior, Postal



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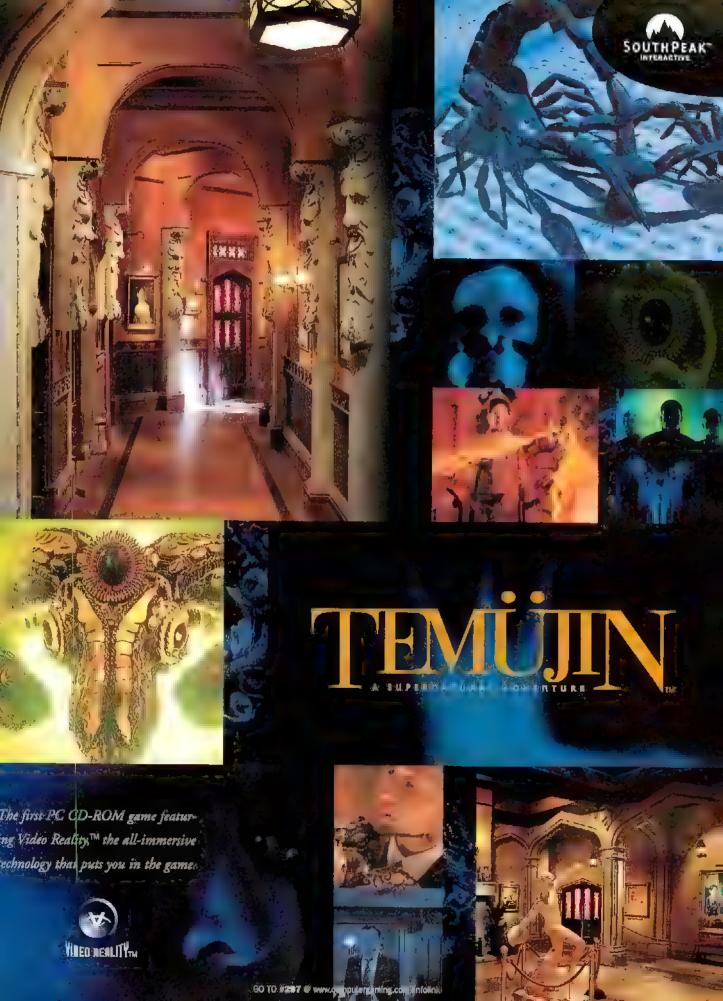
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ANCIENT TREASURES.

AN AGE-OLD MYSTERY.

THE ONLY THING MISSING IS YOUR SOUL







War Is Heaven

SSG and Red Orb Team Up for a Fantastic Return to the Warlords Universe

by Tim Carter

nn the Critical enters a
dark and mysterious
thingeon. He encounters in anny of combie
programmers, and is
victorious. He finds...a
gem. A big fat gem, lu
fact—one that will
keep him happy for, oh,
much more time than

he has available
WARLORDS III, has nehild of the
crew at SSG and marketed
through Broderbund/Red Orb, is a
winner from the soundte your fingernalls hit the celluphane wrap.
Based on one of the few strategy
game designs that deserves the
accolude "classic," WARLORDS III
brings vasily improved depth, replayabili-

und enjoyable game
WARLORDS III follows the basic
turn-based system of its predecessors
for solitaire play, but offers simultaneous turns for those with a hankering for
multiplayer maybern with human
opponents. It ran smoothly and mpidly
on my Pentium 120 and was fully functional in Windows 95.

ty, and nuance to an already successful



Time to the original, gameplay in WARLORDS HI revolves around the control of fortified cities. Individual muts have a dizzying variety of attributes and abilities, and up to eight units may be grouped to form an army. Heroes may explore ruins for beasure or magical items, perform quests for similar rewards, and bestow a number of important combat bonuses to acmes that march under their barrier.

The command structure, which was pretty clean in WARLORDS I and II, remains quite impressive. Moving around the game will be simple even for someone unfamiliar with the interface.



WAR IS HELL WARDROS III is a turn-based fantasy wargame in which combat is resolved a strategic scale, as in Civ. not in tactical mode, like MOM

Lattle, if anything, seemed to have been left out of previous versions, but quite a bit has been added here. For extance, some of your beroes, depending on their class, may now use magic to augment their abbities, which further depend on the race you are playing

Unlike past versions of WARLORDS, individual cities no longer produce distinct units. Each race now has a pool of set unit types to draw on, consistent with that race's base chameleristics and attitudes. Any given race may have eight regular troop types, three mercenaries, four hero classes, four magical allies, and one boat unit.

The first time I played this system, I fell a tiny twinge of disappointment. The more limited armies tend to be a bit drill after a while, and battles over castles aren't as massive in proportion. But after only a few games, I could clearly see the wisdom of this design decision. By limiting gamers to a consistent and fixed set of troops, the designers have greatly extended WARLORDS III's replay value. A game on the same map but with a different race is, functionally, an entirely different game. Moreover, within each

game, each of the different races you fight present a somewhat different threat, based on the strengths and we nesses of their core units.

WARLORDS CUBED

For those who love to mix and match, the scenario setup screen let you create your own race using any the preexisting units. You are limited only by the total number of different unit types per race

The setup screen offers a huge number of other options that build replay value as well—including a prohibitor on maning cities (an Important issue when playing against human opponents), an option that allows neutral cities to grow in power of attacked, we random placement of starting cities.

In addition to the twelve preset see uarios, the game comes with a undor scenario generator and — surprise—a introde campaign game.

As just one example of the playing value in WARLORDS III, the classic Illuminap from the original game is included one of the preset scenarios. This map constituted the entire game in WARLORD.

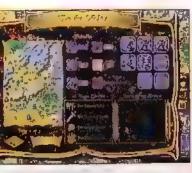
WARLDRDS III

Price: \$49.95 Minunum System Requirements: Penlium 75. Windows 95, 16MB RAM, 40MB hard-disk space, 4x CD ROM, 256-color SVGA graphics, Sound Blaster 16 or 100-percent-compabble 16-bit sound card, 28Kbps or faster Internet connection. Mulliplayer Support: Modem, direct connect (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-6 players) Designer: SSG Publisher: Red Orb Entertainment Novato, CA (800) 548-1798 www.redarb.com

Reader Service #: 342

CGW

OCTOBER 1997



MIGHTY TIM Heroes play an important role in Warlohos III, since they can hunt for treasure, embark on quests, cast spells, and bestow honuses on your troops.

athout many of the options and vaca as available here. Yet, in Wart.orans 111 contitutes a tiny fraction of the consilegame. Having spent a dozen or so up on the Illuma map already, I can say h some certainty that gamers will not ally run and of things to do with we can still.

LL TO ARMS

What you do in WARLORDS III, of the core
the ORDS combat system hasn't anged in structure, but a wide range of odifying factom has been added, give gamers more options when building or annies or taking out the everny. For the conditions in which is a may intribute positive (to your side) or negative (to your opponent's side) modifiers,

while many units also have special attributes or abilities such as assassination attacks, archery attacks, posoning, and disease.

A major asset of past WARLORDS games was the strength of the AL WARLORDS III is no slouch in this department, although 1 found the "Psycho" level somewhat easier than I would have expected for the most

difficult level. While the computer still falls to manage its heroes properly (not picking up treasure lying on the ground when an enemy hero is killed, and ignoring some ruins), it has become much more adept at knocking off your heroes, particularly if you leave them exposed.

I was especially impressed when the AI, during the fifth or sixth scenario of the campaign, made a systematic effort to kill off the heroes I had been carefully nurturing into powerful higher level paladins and mages. The computer will also raid your home territory frequently and Is not averse to scorehed-earth tactics if it starts to lose

According to the manual (generally well done and useful for learning the game and for reference), the diplomatic system has been tweaked considerably from earlier versions. I must admit that I didn't find much functional difference in the new routines. The computer players tended to fight amongst themselves until I had become the biggest single power on the map, at which point they ganged up on me.

FRIENDS AND FOES

Along with the campaign game, the greatest addition to WARLORDS III is the multiplayer option. Playing via the Internet or ii LAN, up to six players can compete in a real-time/simultaneous turns mix. Chasing down enemy heroes and deciding the order in which to move—and saving reserves to react at the last second—are now key decisions when playing against live opponents.

This game has fittle to distike. If the premise doesn't interest you, you may do better shopping elsewhere, but for fan of fantasy and strategy, or just strategy for that matter, WARLORDS III is a winner from the tiniest elven scout to its Selentine elephant shock cavalry.

>APPEAL: Anyone who likes strategy games.

PROSI Fun; ultraclean; tons of replay value; great campaign; multiplayer support. PCOMS: We're

still looking.



Campaigning for Warlords

ew to the Wercopo' system, the compagn page strings together a series of accessors around a plot that has you lead the Salestines against the sell lorde of

the undead Lord Base. Bane has at least one primary ally and even the powers that are supposedly in your union of good are as likely to send, their armies against you as against the principal foe.

against the principal for.

The campaign allows you so carry your top heroes and alkaled number of magical lians from one scenario to the ned, which becomes useful as your heroes growin power. Be careful, though as the computer becomiss



FOR THE SELENTINES A welcome addition is the campaign in Wancoros III, in which you batte the undead forces of Lord Bane.

with adder at picking on unquarted him level betwee life floating too near, the front lines. Other hach scenario, you get the option of upgrading some

of your core military units. I found this almost as attractive as carrying heroes forward. Being able to give your heavy intantry more movement and a better attack factor constitutes a major bonus over the course of multiple scenarios also found the scenarios in the campaign—which can't be played separately—to be among the more challenging pressi games, its many, your enemies get return advantages from terrain, the placement of neutral cities, of the starting disposition of forces. This makes a inter-change of pace from scenarios in which each side starts out equal.

OCTOBER 1997

CGW



Don't Myth It

The Hottest Sports and Strategy Games, Plus a Host of Other Goodies on This Month's CD

trategy and sports gamers, it's your lacky day This month's CD-ROM is check full of your favorite gametypes. The definitive hot pick is our exclusive Myth demo, featuring a special scenario and unit not available anywhere else. If you're still wondering whether or not to buy Activision's

DARK REIGN, our latest demo of this real-time strategy game should help you to make up your mind

For sports fans, there are demos of both the hockey pinna cle, NHL 98, and the promising basketball upstart, NBA Acron 98. For baseball fans, we've bundled a set of utilities that promise to breathe some new life into the Tony LaRussa series and OLD TIME BASEBALL. And if you're a lan of arcade racing, be sure to check out Daytona USA Deluxe. Golfers,



DARK REIGN Experience Activision's vision of the fujore of warfare



MYTH Pray what we like to describe as the Braveheart of computer games.

be sure to check out Empire's THE GOLF PRO, starring Gary Player.

We've also included a demo of the fast-paced pirate game, Shipwreckers! and Sir-Tech's new action-adventure, Excalibur 2555. TEN has given us a selection of its online games, and for puzzle fans, we have both You Don't Know Jack 3 and You Don't Know Jack TV. So what are you waiting for? Get started!

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an alamana and an a

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"...a thinking man's Descent.*" Gamespot

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Computer Gaming World
"Defiance seems destined to
achieve noteworthy status."
Computer Game Entertainment

Game Features:

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 Battles with 18 powerful enemies
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- Death Match play for up to 8 players in 9 challenging levels.

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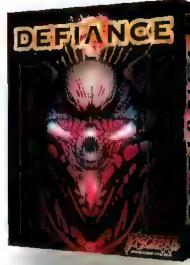
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Computer Gaming World magazine's headline announced, "Avalon Hill's Finest Hour. This Battle of Britain Mixes Real-Time Strategy With Turn-based Tactics." The reviewer went on to say, "For any gamer fascinated by the complexities of many-on-many air combat tactics, or the Battle of Britain in particular, ACHTUNG SPITFIRE's blend of depth, variety, and long-term replayability is sure to please."

CG Choice Award; Rating:

More great praise from Computer Games Strategy Plus magazine. Commenting on the player's ability to control each plane's actions, "This strategic element provides the game with that 'up until 2 00 a.m.' dimension that all great wargames possess." "Highly recommended." Stamp of Approval Award; Rating: ****1/2



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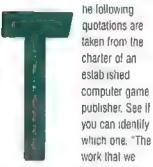
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Death of the Dream

Are Game Publishers Becoming More Market-Savvy or Just Plain Greedy?



publish will be work that appears to the imagination, as opposed to instincts for gratuitous destruction....Not only will we adhere to these values in our own work, but we will also support the efforts of others working toward the same ends....Above all, we will work with an overriding concern for quality integrity, and the unimpeded process of imagination,"

My personal favorite happens to be, "Most businesses today are founded on the idea of making the greatest possible profit in the least possible time. We are not. We are founded on the idea of accomplishing great things."

Of course, this is the same company in which a well-placed execulive once said he could sell dog manure to the customers if he had the right box. It's the same company in which a respected producer asked, "Who cares about the customer, anyway?" Another respected producer once described the company's culture as "enforced mediocrity-the Macintosh mindset." Fortunately, the company wisely sacked the award winning producer who allowed an Amiga game to ranguish until the machine was nearly dead and begged, "Can we please just ship this [expletive deletedt?"

Ironically, the company just did what the sacked producer essentially wanted to do. They rushed a high profile product out the door like a Cesarean section, but went

44 A wellplaced executive said he could sell dog manure to customers if he had the right box. 77

the medical profession one better by throwing the untimely published product into the online seas to sink or swim. Yes, they did just ship that [expletive deleted]!

Of course, my example merely picks on one prominent company, but this degradation of ideals has taken place throughout our industry. More than one company has promised designers and program mers that they would become the rock stars of the next generation.

Then, when fame began to increase the earnings expectations of those

new "stars," The companies started deemphasizing the names of the designers and developers on both game boxes and game documentation. More than one company has made the pledge that it was going to hold games until they were finished and ready for release, only to reverse itself when the end of the fiscal quarter drew near. More than one company has pledged that it would support the consumer by adding such features as network play or scenario editors (free of charge) in later patches, only to double-cross gamers with retail add-on packages that were required in order to actually get those same promised features.

Naturally, many savvy readers in the industry are going to glance at this editorial and ask questions that seem, on the surface, to be fair. "Do you think companies can really stay in business while ignoring the profit mative?" "Do you believe for one moment that we could share technology with our competitors without losing our edge?" "Are you saying that we've reduced our commitment to quality?" (My answers-by the way-are no, yes. and yes.)

The truth is that I believe that quality will lead to profit. Shortcuts to quick profits are a negative investment. Gamers may buy one

crappy, unfinished product from your company, but they aren't likely to buy two. Yet publishers continue to cut their customer service staffs reduce the time to play-test their games, and overwork their quality assurance staffs. Why? Because those are cost centers instead of profit centers. This godes ill for the industry's future.

Further, sharing technology instead of constantly trying to fig. ure out some circumfocutious solution that fights emerging industry standards (and ends up doing one thing better while it does two or three things worse) would advance our industry instead of setting it back. If, as the dreamers in our industry wish, we had standardiza tion, we could reach more potential gamers through ease-of-use and lower costs (for both developers and consumers). Let the wars be fought on the design front, not on the technology front.

Now, I'm enough of a realist to know that we can't always be faithful to our ideals. Changing circum stances force us to compromise. whether we like it or not. Still, once in a while, it helps to go back and look at what we want to be in order to make a course correction and get there. If, of course, we ever believed in the ideals we proclaimed in the first place. &

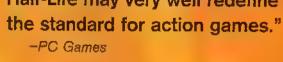














"The best first-person shooter we've seen."

-Gamespot

"Half-Life has some of the best adversaries in the entire action game genre...[it] eclipses the enemy Al in any other action game to date."

-Computer Gaming World

"Gorgeous dynamic textures and intricate levels."

-PC Games

"Valve's skeletal animation system provides gamers with some of the most eerily life-like opponents they've ever seen."

-Computer and Net Player





BLADE BUMMER

There was one game nonceably absent from vous Roliday Hot 100 Buyer's Guide BLADE RUNNER, I was wondering if there was any reason why it didn't even make the "honorable mention" section.

> Jerenny Joyner from the Interset

Fanns von should nonce—Westwood did too! The reason we didn't include BLADE RUNNER is because none of our editors were able to play a portion of the game by December press time. We wanted to include only those games we could play and were confident would ship on time However, by the January issue, we were able to play the game and we were sure it would ship by Christmas, so we included it in the Holiday Cift Cuide (CCW #162, page 72). It's nice to have been in error about a slup date on the positive side for a change

ULTIMA OVERLOOKED?

Your December Buyer's Guide had no mention of Urrisia Ostria. Thave been a reader of CGW for several years and find the Buyers Guide a valuable tool for keeping me aware of the games that are worth purchasing, but you seemed to have missed mentioning one of the baggest advances in gaining technology in a long time.

from the Internet

There's no question that OF TMA ON INF IS breaking new ground and is worthy of coverage Indeed, we have written about the game numerous times over the course of its development However, our Buyer's Guide was strictly for games we could wholeheartedly recommend. Ur TIMA ONLINE, in the version we played, was so unstable, buggy, and unbalanced, that despite its potential—we simply could not ree onnuend it. For a better description of those problems, see our review in this issue

LETTER OF THE MONTH

APACHE UPRISING

I just finished reading the November 1997 issue of CGW, and I was a little upset with a comment made in the "Longbow Restrung" article. Before I continue, let

me address the history of rivalry between the different aircraft associated with the United States

Army. Ever since the Vietnam conflict, when the Army realized that it needed to have different aircraft for different missions, pilots of each type of aircraft have claimed to be the "best" Army pilot, regardless of aircraft or mission.

Since I am an AH-64A Apache pilot recently back from a tour in Bosnia, I took some offense to the comment that the Klowa Warrior was more suited to recon than an AH-64. It was claimed that "because it has a nose-mounted TADS, the Longbow must be completely exposed to use the system "

As all Apache pilots and, I'm sure, many computer gamers know, employing your equipment to exploit its strengths is integral to winning the battle. The easy method of laterally unmasking prevents exposing the entire aircraft. Simply put, poke the nose of the aircraft out from behind some trees perpendicular to where you wish to see, then orient the TADS 90 degrees to either side and take a look for yourself. This method exposes only the nose of the alreraft, which isn't much more than a TADS on a Klowa

As with most equipment, whether computer-generated or real, knowing it intimately is key to employing it properly.

> Brian C. Stehle Cpt, U.S. Army

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what is sin?



and its lethally gorgeous

CEO, Elexis Sinclaire,

are connected to the

madness. As a top

security professional,

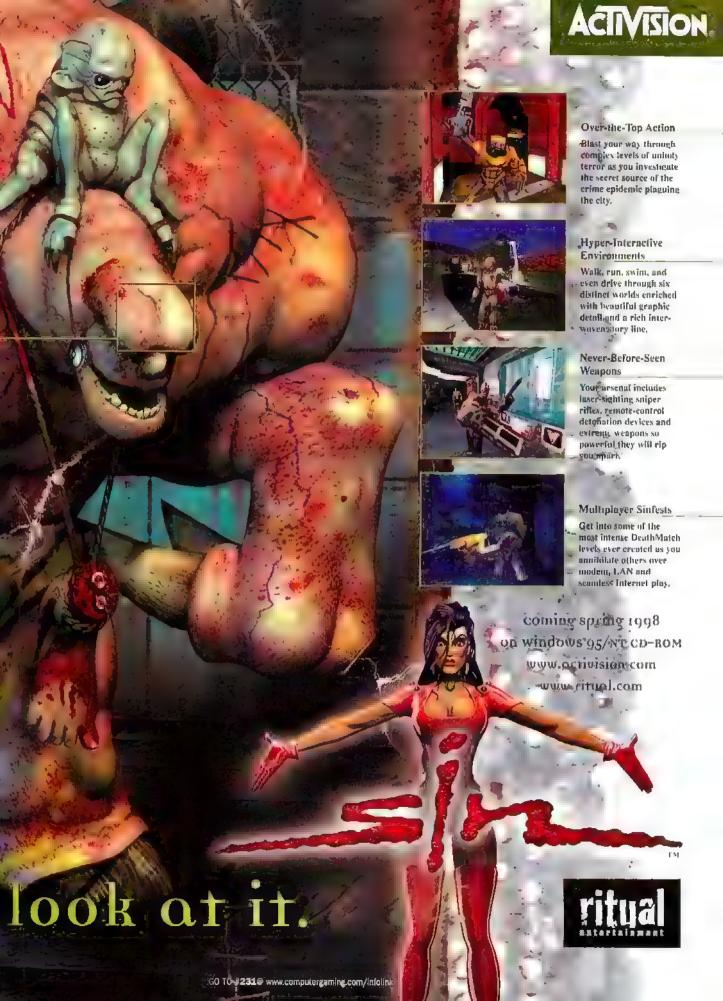
it's up to you, Colonel

John R. Blade, to discover

who or what is behind

this sinful plague.

it's all in how you



ARCADIAN INQUEST

Lam unable to remember what game compilation you mentioned in your magazare that included POLE POSITION, Can you help?

> Nancy Donnell Round Mountain, NV

Sure, we'll miswer your letter together with this next one

Lam looking for areade games from the early/mid-1980s, I have seen the two Microsoft Arcade packages, but also would like to know if there are other games from that era available. Specifically, Larn looking for games such as DONSIG, KONG, DEFENDER TROS, and CALACA.

Todd Williamson

FROSTBULE, GRAND PRIX, H.E.R.O., KABOOM!, Privall!, RIVER RAID, SEAQUEST, SKI JINKS, and SPIDER FIGHTER

Atari 2600 Action Pack 2 for Windows (Activision): ATLANTIS, BARNSTORMING, DOLPHIN, DRAUSTER, ENDURO, ICH HOCKIA, KEASTONE KAPERS, LASER BLAST, MEGAMANIA, OINK, PLAOUF ATTACK, RIVER RAID H, SKIING, STAMPEDE, and TENNES.

Atari 2600 Action Pack 3 for Windows 95 (Activision): BREAKOUT, CANYON BOMBER, CHECKERS, COMBAT, DOUBLE DRAGON, NIGHT DRIVER, PRESSURE COOKER, PRIVATE FOR, SPACE WAR, STARMASTER, TELE MARCH PRO WRESTLING, and YARS' REVENCE Microsoft Areade: ASTEROIDS.

from the Internet

We can't help you much with those particular titles. There is a version of CALAGA on the Web (www.fsr.com/ people/mmink/javu/Galaga himl), but as with many

games on the Web, it could be shot down by the trademark holder at any time. For the benefit of others who may

be looking for areade classics, here are the lists for five different compilations.

Atari 2600 Action Pack for Windows (Activision): BONING, CHOPPER COMMAND, COSMIC COMMUTER, CRACKPOTS, FISHING DERBY, FREEMAY,

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puserve.com

A A L A A TO W æ O C Galoga Ple t Bundo Gime CAR DESIGNATION OF PERSON south in south of the sorthwest of lease sage

> CENTIFEDE, MISSUE COMMAND, plus-BATTLEZONE and TEMPEST

Return of Microsoft Arcade: Dic-Dic. GALAXIAN, PAC MAN, and POLE POSITION

HOLLYWOOD COMMANDER

Thave always enjoyed the WING COMMANDER series, I recently saw the movie Starship Troopers and I was wondering if Origin plans to come out with a WING COMMANDER movie.

> Calvin Ng from the Internet

Electronic Arts recently sold the rights to develop a WING COMMANDER movie or cartoon television series, or both, to Digital Anvil, the company founded by WING COMMANDER creator Clins Roberts. Roberts has long held that the title would make an excellent film property 🕏

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READIME The Latest News From the Computer Gaming World

Edited by Charlotte Panther (CPanther@zd.com)

Jacksonville Wins Super Bowl

CGW Sims the Big Game So You Don't Have to Watch



son's hot new games. Kansas City at Pittsburgh

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nother boring Super Bowl party? Don't waste your time! Using Sierra's FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL PRO 98. CGW has already determined that the Jacksonville Jaguars, behind lefty QB Mark Brunnell (who throws right-handed in FPS 98, by the way) will dump Steve Young and the 49ers by the rather unusual score of 12-8.

This year's Super Snooze Fest will be led by Jacksonville's Natrone Means, who will run over and around the Niner defense for 104 yards. Now that you know, you don't have to blow Super Bowl Sunday in front of your television. Blow it in front of your computer Instead, playing some of the sea-

How did we make our predictions? Simple, First we downloaded the mid-season player ratings from Gridfron Flashback, an excellent Web site (http://www.courant. infl.net ~ mpfl/fpsf.htm) devoted to the FRONT PAGE Series. Then, using our newly updated rosters, we played the season from Week 13 onward with FPS 98's Fast Sim feature. We cheated a little by starting with the NFL teams' actual records through Week 12. Although there were a few surprises (the Broncos choked in the playoffs again, for example), the teams that made it to the Super Bowl certainly seemed plausible. For the big dance, we played a standard FRONT Page game, with the CPU control ling both teams and using the regular physics based model. Obviously, the Jags had better physics than the Niners.

-Dennis McCauley

OFFS

Pittsburgh 24-23

NY Lets at Mami.

Miami 33-3

Tampa Bay at NY Grants

NY Giants 20-19

Oallas at Green Bay

Green Bay 19-10

Divisional

Miami at Denver

Mlami 14-7

Pittsburgh at Jacksonville

Jacksonville 31-3

Green Bay at Minnesota

Green Bay 23-13

NY Giants at San Francisco

San Francisco 23-13

AFC Championship

Miami at Jacksonville

Jacksonville 26-17

NFC Championship

Green Bay at San Francisco

San Francisco 20-9

Super Bowl

San Francisco 49ers

vs. Jacksonville Jaguars

Jacksonville 12-8

I-'76 Funks You Again

he '70s are back and bigger than ever listenstate '76 is also coming back for a second go round in the form of a multimission expansion pack—listenstate '76 Nitrao Pack. The Vigitalite Files. This game has a long name and a long list of enhancements for the original game.

The Nuno Pack is a psuedo preque. It's a collection of standatione missions that take place before the events of intenstate

'76 There is no campaign or running story, but the missions all have the same informative, colorfu

voiceovers and goats. You If be able to play several missions as Taurus, Skeeter, or Jade.

The Nitrio Pack has 3D support right out of the box for the 3Dfx, Rendition, and STB Nitro cards, as well as force feedback

THE ORIGINAL TEAM You can play missions as Taurus

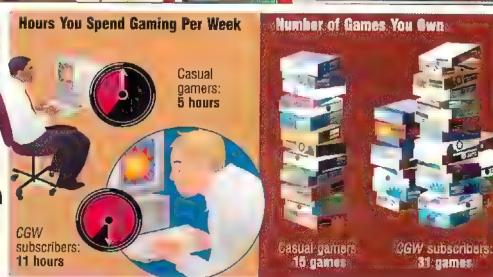
(left), Jade(right), or Skeeter (not pictured).

support. The graphics for the Nitro Pack are a treat, and the gameplay is boosted with the inclusion of nine new cars and several new weapons. Multiplay is also enhanced with capture-the-flag and traditional racing scenarios.

Best of all, the Nitro Pack does not require a copy of the original game. The VigiLante Files should be available in stores by March 1998. —Ellioff Chin.

The visual experience is enhanced, while the great gameplay of the original I-'76 remains intact.
The Nitro Pack offers new vehicles such as an Army Jeep, a limousine, an ice cream truck, and a hearse.







Mesmai Corporation recently announced that it has leamed up with Engage Games Online and SegaSoft's HEATNET to form GameStorm. a new prime gaming service. GameStorm will allow gamers to choose from a huge selection of games including massively multiplayer titles from Kesmai and Engage and fast action games from HEAT.NET. all for a flat membership fee of \$9.95 per month. The service will also feature news, reviews, and downloads from GameSpot For more information, head to www.gamestorm.com.

>> The Cyberathlete Organization recently announced the formation of a new gamers' league called the Cyberathelete Professional League (CPL). The CPL will introduce a new Cyberalhelete ranking system and tournaments will be requi lated by a board of directors consisting of fon Storm's Mike Wilson and John Romero: Altuai Entertainment's Harry Miller and Mike Wardwell and Otake Clan-Ring's Frank Cabanski, The first CPL tournament will take place in Datlas on March 6. and is expected to attract about 2,000 players worldwide. The tournament will have cash prizes totaling about \$59,000, as well as other prizes such as compuler systems, penpherals, and games. Check out www. cyberathelete.com for fur-

Description of the description o

ther information and updates.

PLAYING LATELY 181 21 25 1. Diable (Blizzard/CUC) 10 2. Quake (ld Software) 3. Civilization II (MicroProse) 4. Red Alert (Westwood/Virgin) 5 5. Dungeon Keeper (BullFrog/EA) 3 9 6. Heroes II: POL (New World Computing) 21 7. Duke Nukem 3D (3D Realms) f 8. X-COM: Apocalypse (MicroProse) 10 . Heroes II (New World Computing) 10. Tomb Haider (Elbs) and phodinar licitions toalny ranking vin the 100 °CE Dote it. will. 1. Microsoft Flight Simulator 98 (Microsoft) 2. Riven: The Sequel to Myst (Broderbund/RedOrb) 3. Jedi Knight (LucasAris). 4. Myst (Broderbund) 5. Lego Island (Minds apr) 6, C&C: Aftermath (Westwood/Virgin) 7. Age of Emptres (Microsoft): 8. Deer Hunter (GT Interactive) 9. Ultima Online (Origin/EA) 10 NHL Hockey '98 (EA Sports) i Indicales what the topiselling KC Ormes Mark as calisticited

Low-priced Software, No Mundo Chumbo

he holidays are over and you're broke, but there are tons of games out there that Santa didn't bring you. Well now there's a way to get your milts on all the hol titles, right when you want them, without giving your bank manager an embolism.

Following in the footsteps of companies like Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble online, Chumbo Corporation recently made its debut in the world of e-commerce. Instead of selling books, however, Chumbo is offering software—with all the hottest games available at an extra-tow price. Chumbo claims that because it is conducting business via the Internet, which requires less overhead than a regular business, it is able to pass on the savings directly to the customer. Chumbo has established a partnership with the Point Group, a company that specializes in creating bundles of software, who will put together exclusive packages, providing added value for users.

Chumbo has also teamed up with software distributor Mensel to ensure the availability of software as soon as a customer places an order. Gamers

can also place advance orders to be guaranteed a copy of an eagerly anticipated title the day it ships.

According to Chumbo's founder and president, David Prais, the more a gamer uses the site, the more personal the experience will become. Chumbo will watch and analyze the behavior of individual shoppers, pln pointing their interests and presenting them with special offers in line with their specific needs. Should customers request 1, Chumbo's Push technology will automatically download demos, reviews, and news to the person's machine when it is not in use. The sile will also feature game reviews and lips provided by ZDNet. Ready to shop? Head over to www.chumbo.com and you're sure to pick up a bargain -Charlotte Panther



Short takes on games and hardware received just over to press time

BLADE RUNNER

if Curse or Monkey
Island represents the pinnacte of old-school adventure gaming Blade Runner does the same
for new school adventuring
Though it may not be a true 3D
real-time adventure, it's still an
excellent game. The beautiful preredered backgrounds and the stunning
sound effects borrow elements from
both the film and the novel to create
an immersive almosphere. The game
is nonlinear, and gameplay involves

randomly deciding who is, and who

randomly deciding who is, and who is not, a Replicant. Though the player characters are extremely pixelated (a d sappointment after seeing the cut-scenes), and there are some interface issues, the overall product

Is superb. —Thierry Nguyen
Westwood Entertainment,
(800) 874-4607
www.westwood.com
Win 95 CD-ROM

VIRTUAL POOL 2

Interplay/VR Sport's Vienual Pool 2 has some cool new features, including 3D hardware accelerator support (via Direct30), greatly sphanced graphics, and a better cueconirol system. One frustrating

thing VP2 does on instal is make you sit through a traller for an upcorning interplay Star Trek title. After that annoyance, however, VP2 is terrific, offering a wide variety of b. hards



Action Guys & Dells

othing beats the movie business for merchandise lie-ins, but if more software companies follow the example of GT Interactive and Erdos, it might not be long before fast-food vendors are touting five-inch miniatures of your favorite computergame character with your cheeseburger

GT has joined forces with toy maker ReSaurus to develop a line of Duke Nukern action figures, based upon the smart-mouthed antihero of Apogee/3D Realm's Duke

Nukem game series. Available now, Duke comes armed with a two-handed Devestator, two Uzis, and a bloody knife. If you buy over the Internet, (www.resaurus.com/dukepage1.html) your purchase will include a Duke Nukem shareware CD plus a limited production Freeze Thrower, for \$12.99. The retail version (\$7.99) will not include the CD, and only 1 out of 12 units sold in stores will include the special edition weapon. ReSaurus has three other Duke 3D characters currently in development.

Pigcop, Battlelord Boss, and Octabrain. Action figures based on the upcoming Duke NukeM FOREVER char

acters are also in the works, and will be ready in time for the release of the game.

Move over Barbie—Lara Croft is now gracing toy store shelves, too. Toy Biz the creators of Marvel's *The Amazing Spiderman*. The Incredible Hulk, and X-Men action figures recently teamed up with Eidos to create an action figure of the sassy Toma Rainer heroine. Lara comes armed with an assortment of weapons from the game, and the toy line also takes into account the ..er enhancements Lara received in Toma Rainer II. At press time, the action figure's exact price had not been determined, but Eidos did confirm that it would retail for less than \$10. Charlotte Panther.



Grand Prize: Rederick LeVan of Rock Hill, SC Roderick wars the Thursderseat Technologies Thursderseat, a CH Products Force EX Josephus, a realthey bromber jacket, and the deluxe Right sim package.

Summer Sim Sweepstakes Winners

You may remember that way, way back in August, we held our Summer Sim Sweepstakes Competition. Well, the good news is that we have three lucky winners. The bad news is that not all of the

1st Prize: Fred Wickman of Farhold, CA. Fred wins ACT Laboratory's EnglishTAX Joyatek. ACT Laboratory's Poweroung Gamepad, and the defined light and package. games in our prize deluxe flight sim package have been released yet. But, what the heck? We've kept you in suspense long enough. So, now, the moment you've all been waiting for...

2nd Prize: Dwane Worden of Houston, TX

Removement our defined flight state package, which includes
pind of the best hight sims around

eight-ball, straight pool, and it flerent sets of rules (American, English, APA, BCA). You can also play VP2 multiplayer over modern, LAN, or Internet. If you're bonkers for billiards, then check this one out. — Dave Salvator

Interpiay, (800) INTERPLAY www.interpiay.com PC CD-ROM

THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND

After six long years, Guybrush Threepwood finally makes his tri umphant return in the latest installment of the Monkey Island series. While other companies were busy cloning Mysr, LucasArts stuck to its guns, learned from its mistakes, and created a new adventure game in the old-school style.

Featuring fush, colorful graphics; decent voiceovers; and witty dialogue that zings back and forth between Guybrush and the other characters, Curse of Monkey Island shows that you can still make a great adventure game the old fash oned way. This, along with Zork Grand Industrial could mark the beginning of an adventure

came renaissance

-Thierry Nguyen

LucasArts Entertainment, (800) 985-8227 www.lucasarts.com Win 95 CD-ROM





PNOTIGIN has granted an option to acquire the live-action feature film and television rights to its Wing Commander game series. The rights were granted to Digital Anvit, the company led by Wing Commander creator Chris Roberts. The film will be based on characters, storylines, and themes from littles one through four of the Wing Commander series, which were developed by Origin over the past eight years.

After daring to tear apart great American institutions such as Star Wars and The X Files, Parroty Interactive is back, and this time its unfortunate victim is a certain Mr. Gates, Entitled Microswart Winecows 98, Parroty's product pokes fun al Microsoft-the company, the software, and the man who made it all possible. Bill's Personal Outlook allows you to snoop through Mr. Gales' "to-do" list, emall, and journal, in the board game The Roll Ahead, players can "Be Like Bill" acquiring corpora tions and investing millions: Winblows Exploder lets you shoot your way through a universe of computer bugs and error messages. Our favorile, Inough, is the Bijagotchi-a cyberpal that thrives if you feed il lots of money, but will throw lantrums if you don't give it the altention it deserves

P>Speaking of cyberpets,
Tamogoloti, creator, Bandeli,
has developed a CD-ROM
version of the lovable tittle alien,
available for about the same
price as the key chain pet. The
CD-ROM includes a couple of
extra features, the best of which
is a day-care center where you
can deposit your pet, without
feeling guilty, whenever other
duties call. For more information
head to www.bdec.com.



Diecover a new horizon Lassic AD&D role playing.

RPG experience. This wondrous place we are to e playing on a visually dezzling, real-time reperience. This wondrous place we are to e playing on a grand scale first began, now comes alive in stunning graphic detail. Your quest? Lead a party of adventurers on a journey to save the Sword Coast region from a sinister plot that involves impending was clark prophecies betrayed alliances...even your own soul.

- Huge game world-5 CDs filled with nearly 10,000 game screens in striking SVGA, all rendered in glorious 16-bit color
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- Authentic ADSD[®] characters, each represented accurately on screen down to individual class, race, gender, skin and hair color, armor and weaponry
- Manage up to a 6-character party on a gripping, non-linear adventure spanning seven chapters with multiple twisting subplots

Baldurs Gate





Dûngeons & Dragons









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We're Not Dead Yet!

But Recent Moves Suggest That 7th Level Is in Need of Some Life Support

th Level shocked the gaming industry recently with the announcement that its highly successful Monty Python game line was on the selling block. The news came just a few months after ion Storm's acquisition of 7th Level's real time strategy game, Dominion (along with its designer, Todd Porter). All this activity left 7th Level with just one major gaming LLe, RET MIN TO KRONDON, the role play

ing game by best-selling science liction fantasy author Raymond Felst, and the true

sequel to Sierra On-Line's acclaimed Bethayal at Khondon

All was revealed at Comdex, where 7th Level made yet another announcement—that it had acquired Pulse Entertainment, developers of adventure game 8Ab Moun and the upcoming 3D shooter SPACE BURNES Must Dis. The two companies have merged management and operations to form a new company called P7 Solutions. P7 with no longer publish games, and will instead focus on Internet solutions.

So what about the games? Well, Take 2 Interactive, publishers of Rieper, the upcoming Brack Dahua, and the LET FIGHTER series, acquired distribution rights to all the Monly Python titles. Then immediately sold all American distribution rights to Panason c Interactive Media. Take 2 retains the European distribution rights. The latest litle in the Monly Python series, The Meaning or LIFE is strategy/adventure game containing previously unreleased film footage and new dialogue from all the original dast members, is still scheduled for a December release. As for the Pulse titles, the members of the Seact Business Must Die production team have formed a new company, Jinx, and will continue to work on the product. According to Jinx CEO Vinny Carrolla, Ripcord (a division of Panasonic Interactive Media) and P7, which are both minority shareholders in Jinx, have been very supportive in helping the company get off the ground. Carrolla is enthusiastic about the new mover. "It's like moving out of your parents' house for the first time. It's really scary, but it's also really exciting." Plans for Ripcord to publish Seace Busines are still going ahead, and the game is set to meet its summer 1998 schedule.

And, in a surprise move, Sierra announced that it had acquired PyroTechnix from 7th Level, bringing the Kapunna series back into the fold. Sierra Northwest, the company's Seattle based development division, is working with Raymond Feist and PyroTechnix, and the company anticipates a late 1998 release for the game.

- Charlotte Panther

THIS JUST IN

SWIV

SWIV Arst appeared on the Super Ninlen

Ain ga, then migraled to the Super Minlando Enterlainment

latest stop on the PC SWIV is nothing spectacular—it's basically a quick actionarcade romp with some pretty eyecandy in the game, you pitot different vehicles across a variety of levels

System before its

and terrain types. As with many other arcade shooters, SWIV offers a variety of power-ups to make your vehicle tougher, faster and the like. The game also has 30tx acceleration, and the terrain looks nice. Ultimately, though, SWIV is a simple shoot-fem-up that offers nothing truly groundbreaking to the genre.

-Thierry Nguyen

Interplay, (800) INTERPLAY www.interplay.com PC CO-ROM

Acor: X-Flaktors Sierra Asheron's Call Turbine/Microsoft Spring 98 Spring 98 Battlezone Activision Dalkatana Ion Storm/Eldos 3/98 4/98 **Buccunt Freespace** Interplay Earthsings 3 Sierra Spring 98 3/98 Falcen 4.0 MicroProse 4/98 Final Fantasy VII Squaresoft 5/98 Great Baities of Cassar Interactive Magic **Exarchers: Agents of Justice** MicroProse 4/98 2/96 Midden Wars Regin IF-IA-18 Interactive Magic 4/98 **Franzer 44** Interactive Magic 2/98 Spring 98 Jane's F-15 EA/Jane's 2/98 Journeyman Project 3 Broderbund 3/98 M-1 Tank Pizican II MicroProse 4/98 MachCommander MicroProse Summer 98 **MIG Alley** Empire Of Light & Darkwass Interplay 3/98 2/98 Populous: The Third Coming EA/Builfreg Spring 98 Quest For Blory V Sierra Reducted Sethesda Spring 98 Nevolution Fenris Wolf/GT Interactive Fall 98 Semper Fi Interactive Mapic 2/98

Sid Motor's Atpha Contaut Firaxis/EA

Squad Leader Big Time/Avaion Hill

Vitimate Civ II MicroProse

WarGraft Anventures Slizzard

Warhammer: Dark Smen EA

X-Files Advoctore Game Fox Interactive Summer 98

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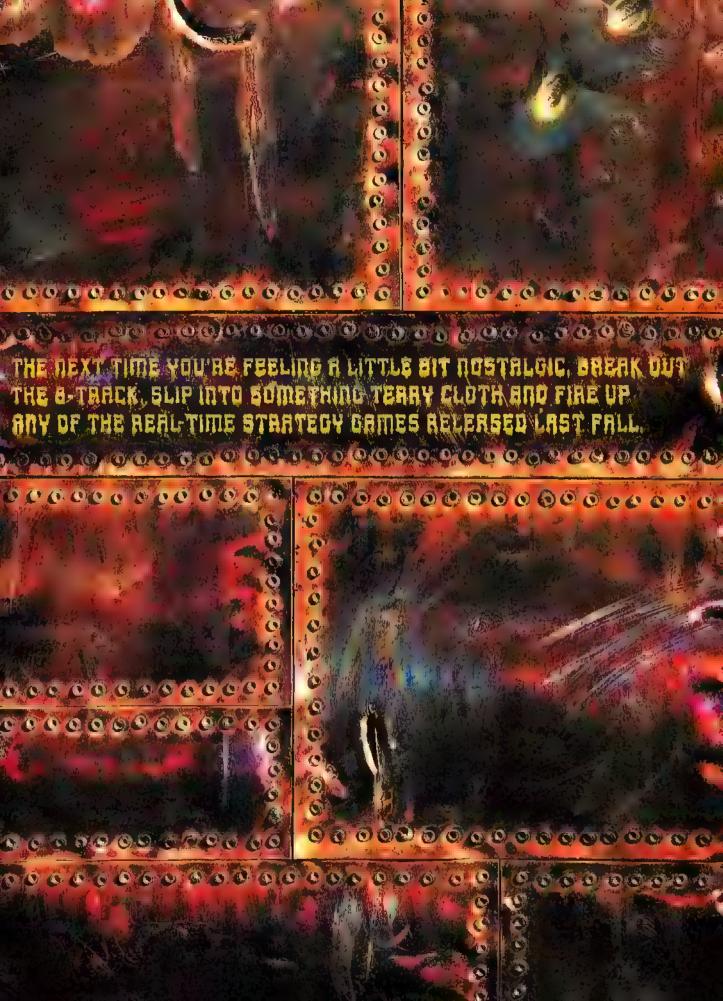
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5/98

4/98

3/9B

PIPELINE







RULES MUST BE BROKEN. LATEGORIES MUST BE ERASED. EMPERORS

MUST BE OVERTHROWN THE STATUS QUO MUST BE SPANKED: AND CONTENTMENT MUST BE ROUTINELY TAKEN OUTSIDE AND SMACKED UPSIDE THE HEAD. IT'S A DIRTY JOB BUT SOMEBODY HAS TO GO IT AND WE'RE ALL READY TO APPLY FOR THE POSITION

WE'RE ION STORM, A BUNCH OF MISER, ZEALOT FREAKS WHO TRIED TO REST ON THE TOTAL THE WAS A GAP OUT THERE A BLG FAT VOID, AND WE WERE HELL BENT ON FILLING IT. WE HAD ALL

LIVED ON THE EDGE, BUT WE WERE READY TO JUMP OFF. SO HERE WE ARE. HEW NAME.

NEW IDENTITY, NEW GAMES RATTLING THEIR DAGES, WAITING TO BE LET OUT.

HOHN ROMERO CONGRETAIRED SMART-ASS KNOWN FOR HIS FAST FERRARI AND HIS LINCAND MEDICALLY REALLY WELL

OH YEAR, THERE WAS ALSO THAT DOBM AND QUAKE THING.











TOM HALL: A FUNNY GUY WHO WANTE TO BET ALL TOUCHY-FEELY WITH HIS GAMES HAS SOME SILLY
IDEA THAT COMPUTER GAMES HAVE TO BE STUFFED FULL OF PERSUNALITY, INTERESTING CHARACTERS
AND INTERACTIVITY IN A PAST LIFE,
HE CO-CREATED WOLFENSTEIN 3D, DOOM AND

RISE OF THE TRIAD, AND WAS ONE

OF THE ORIGINAL FOUNDERS OF SOME SMALL COMPANY CALLED ID.









JERRY O'FLAHERTY: HIGHLY TALENTED PAINT MONKEY WHO GETS INTO EVERYTHING: ART, FILMMAKING, 3-D MODELING AND ANIMATION

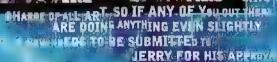






NOT TO MENTION BUNCH OF STUFF HE KEEPS UNDER HIS BED AND WON'T SHOW ANYBODY.

HIS JOB DESCRIPTION NOW SAYS HELE IN







DEMINION. SEFEELDAR

THE EYEVE THE STURM









ION STORW

BOB "POPULAR" WRIGHT: A TOKEN GRAY-HAIR
GIVEN THE TITLE CHILA OPERATING
OFFICER TO MAKE HIM FEEL IMPORTANT:
KNOWN AROUND THE APPLIES AS
"THE FINISHER" AND AS "THE

GUY WHO GETS THINGS DONE," BIG IN THE











IN THE FUTURE, ALL SAMES WILL BE ANACHRENSK.











WHO WANTS TO REVOLUTIONIZE WAS INDUSTRY IT REBODY WATCHING?









POSSIBLE FOR ALL AMERICANS
TO BUY QUAKE AND A
SLUPPER IN THE SAME
PLACE, RUMORED TO BE A
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

BUT NOT DIKELY TO LIVE

MORE THAN ANOTHER YEAR: HE
BELIEVES THAT ALL THE
BEST PROPLE DIE
WHEN THEY RE 27

TODD PORTER A MANAGEMENT PLAYING NATTY, GO TYPE WHO THINKS AMES SHOULD BE AS STYLISH AS HE IS AN AROUND SAYING THINGS LIKE WIN THE GAMING INDUSTRY,
THERE IS NO TOMORROW. THEN TURKS AROUND AND DESIGNS
THAT WAY, DANGEROUS WITH A HAMMERED.
DULCIMER WHEN HE'S BEEN OUT DRINKING.



FLIGHT UNLIMITED II IS SO REAL...IT'S UNREAL.



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Man the cockpit of the legendary DeHaviland Beaver Scaplane and experience something you can't with any other flight sim—land on water.



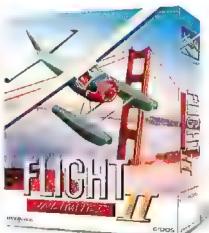
Battle torrential rains and heavy crosswinds. Fly through the most hazardous, realistic weather conditions.



Test your skills attempting to evade a pair of F-16s that are trying to blast your built out of restricted airspace.



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Flight Unlimited II immerses you in the sheer thrill of flying like nothing you've ever experienced. Pull mind-bending G's in your quicksilver P51-D Mustang. Play chicken with F-16s. Get on the horn with Air Traffic Control as you pick your way through skies filled with aircraft. Hurtle under the Golden Gate Bridge and around the TransAmerica tower. With Flight Unlimited II, you're not just flying, you're really flying.

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chastilied weapons systems, this is one fight you wonlt want to miss.

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COMPUTER GAMES STRATEGY PLUS DHLINE GAMING REVIEW (COMPUTER PLAYER) JOINT STRUCE FIGHTER **EIDOS** www.cidosinteractive.com GO TO #277 @ www.computergaming.com/infolink



EXPLOSIVE BREAKTHROUGHA

It's mellenging enough to create a realistic alriquite. Sul vien your intent is to create a language, immersive war experience, for the reason, Eldos developed Commandant in the light sime. Commandant in the light sime. Commandant in the intelligent games.

Flying Nightmares

Adding to FH2's sense of immersion is the most sophisticated multi-player technology ever seen in allows for unprecedented levels fould be in air battles with up to 16 flight jocks while freeing your troops from danger below sure to now you away.

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LOLE (.C. . W) ROLLEY WIS TROUB ACTION WERE IN

ACTION VIEW

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You've been warned.

JIM'S RESTAURANT#3

iteopki,

BRISTOL, ENGLAND -- AS CONAL WILMOT

EXPLAINS IT, "I SEE HER EVERYWHERE...

IN THE PUB, THE SHOPS AND ONCE, RIGHT THERE

NEXT TO ME IN THE LOO. BUT THEN, I TURN MY HEAD

AND SHE'S GONE." CONAL'S MOM THINKS HE'S "PLAIN BARKING

MAD." HIS BEST BUDDY MICK JUST WISHES IT WOULD HAPPEN TO HIM.















Inset photo (above): Without warning, tea time becomes TR II time.







Command your forces to shred attacking allens



Strategic white knuckle flight sim



Fly America's stealthy new secret weapon.



Did you doubt that Lara would be back?



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DEATHTRAP DUMINUM

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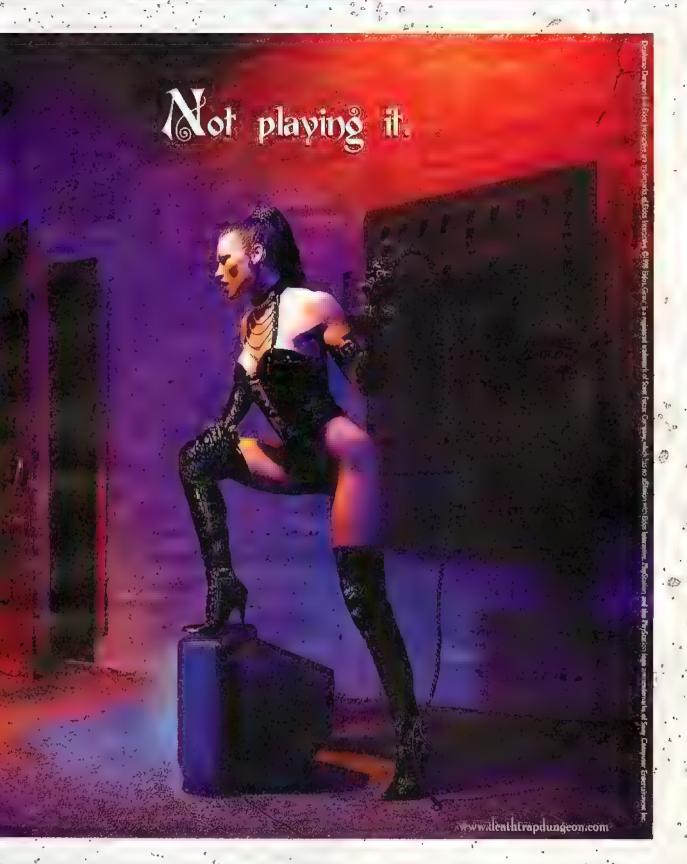








Seat me. Whip me, Just don't hit that Quit button." Consider it your battle cry. Then bring on the skeletal warriors, zombies and over 50 other undead denizens. Each one is a chance to slice and thee like a Ginsu baile gone bad. An opportunity to master the 13 death—implements at



your disposal. Or play the PC version and leave the other on-line players crying for more. Because in these 10 cavernous levels of evil traps, its all about blurring that fine line between pleasure and pain. And just when you think you can't take it any longer, consider the alternative.



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TAKE YOU OUT OF THE TUNNELS AND INTO THE VAST WONDERS OF SPACE.







Parallax Software



INTRODUCING

Myst the Boat

RIVEN, have sold a combined total of more than 3 million copies worldwide, and have tapped into the casual gaming market in a way that no other game series has ever done. However, they have also been criticized for their lack of a detailed plot



Hyperion Books, But what of the promised comics from Dark Horse? Cyan and Dark Horse confirm that Myst: The Book of the Black Ships will not be continued beyond the first issue, which was published in August, "There were communication problems between

the two companies. It didn't turn out the way we expected," says Bonnie Staub,

spokesperson for Cyan, Dark Horse agrees that the comic book medium isn't the best formal for what Cyan was trying to accomplish.

There are no plans to approach other comic book publishers with the story, which fails chronologically between the first novel and Myst. But, says Staub, that doesn't mean more novels won't appear sometime in the future, "They made up this whole backstory for the first game so there wouldn't be any holes, and it just grew and grew," she says, "Now | think they just want to take some time off!"-Kate Hedstrom

Same Game, New Name

acing fans be warned Papyrus' recently released CART Racingnot to be confused with

MICROSOFT'S CART PRECISION Racing—is actually a rerelease of 1995's INDY CAR Racing II. Papyrus was forced to rename an old product as a result of the splitting of the CART and the Indy Racing League. CART RACING does include



some upgrades, however, including Rendition 3D support and a 200-page strategy guide. - Matthew Schaefer

NICHTMARE NED

Armed only with a spitlire yo-yo and his own wits and cunning, a young man faces his deepest, darkest fears in Disney's Nightmare Neb. It's all in the sport of fun however. Part stralegy and part arcade, the game features five nightmare worlds for young players to visit and explore. There's the graveyard, the school, the infirmary, the allic, the basement, and the balliroom. Each realm features its own brand of traps, passages, and demons. Then there are the Shadow Creatures.

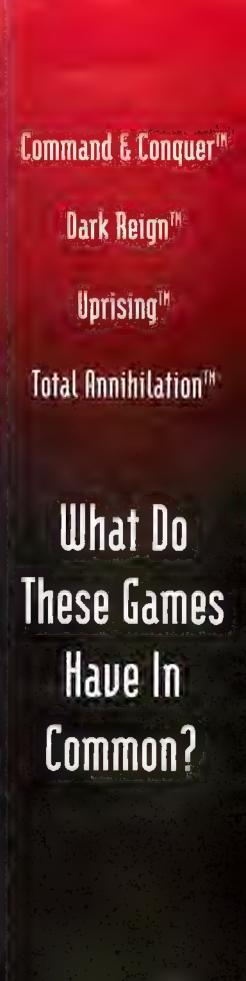
each of which occupies a mohtmare and gradually reveals itself as its world is

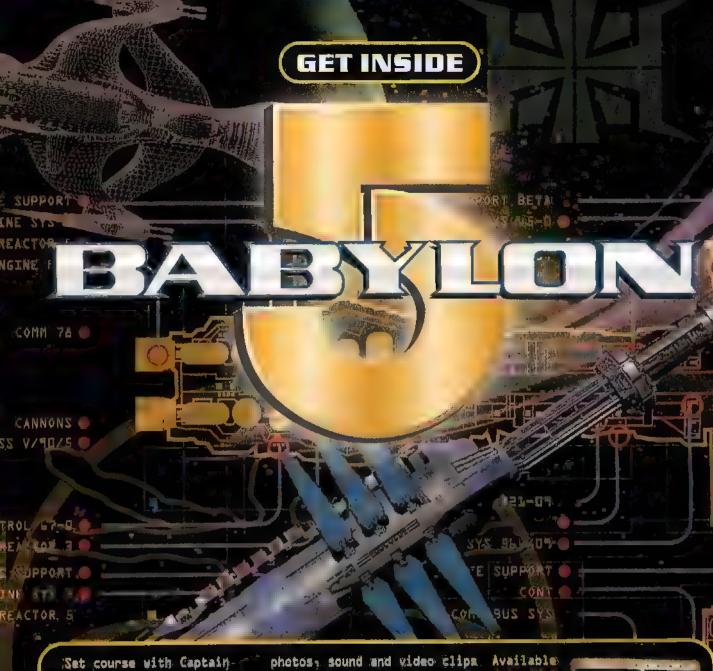
explored. Reveal all five creatures to win the game. - Allen Greenberg

Disney Interactive, (800) 237-6751 PC CD-ROM

www.disnevinteractive.com







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www.sierra.com/babylon5

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Your Worst Nightmare

hat do you get if you combine Vietua Fighter 2, Tomb Raider, and Jack the Ripper's hometown? Probably some-

thing very much like Activision's

CREATURES, a third person action game in which

In the Works >

gamers fight zombies, werewolves, and demons in feroclous hand to hand combat on the rain si cked streets

of early 19thcentury London Nightmare

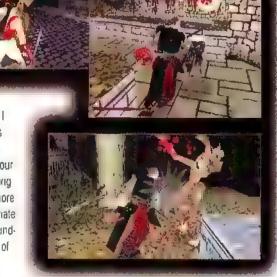
CREATURES
wants to take
full advantage
of gamers'
rapid adoption
of 3D cards,

but, unfortunately, the early build I played hadn't quite worked out its personal problems with the 3Dfx chipset. Still, what I saw was encour aging. Drifting fog, dynamic righting effects, wicked explosions, and more all help create a mood of appropriate by gothic menace. A brooding sound-track further enhances the sense of impending danger.

Both the living and undead are rendered in Gouraud-shaded, full-3D graphics. Gamers can square off against the gruesome assortment of monsters as one of two characters, a muscle-bound priest or a lithe, sword wielding female student.

Mulipoint codision detection allows gamers to lop off heads, slash creatures in half, and enjoy the happy glow that comes from blowing a demon's arms off and watching him lurch back for more. More saving opportunities would be welcome, but Nightmare Creatures looks as though it

could be a pulse-pounding dream come true. Robert Colley



In Niohtmane Cheatures, you can play as a musclebound priest or a sword-wielding student to rid 19th-century England of its monatrous scourge.

WATERWORLD Conceived at the same time as the movie. WATERWORLD'S great cut-scenes use the same sets and lesser actors from Costner's saga. The music and sound effects are also good. But the interface, while soud and smooth, shows its age. The squad-level gameolay, à la JACGED ALLIANCE, IS SIMPLE and unchallenging. There is only one linear campaign of 22 scenarios, so the game has no

replay value, it also has no

multiplayer capability, But it does capture the rough and

tough feel of the post-apocalyptic world, so il might appeal to fans of the movie or beginning gamers. Everybody else should stay high and dry. —Mike Fay

Interplay, (800) INTERPLAY Windows 96 CD-ROM www.interplay.com

SAND WARRIORS

This game about Egyptian hillbillies in futur istic fighter craft is buggy and crash-prone.

Gameplay is weak from the first goofy cut-scene to the end of

the uninspired missions. You

pilot an improbable looking pseudo Egyptian aircraft that has no aircraft feet at all. Heck, Astenoios has a better flight model. The graphics need improvement (they're bearable only at 800x600), and the Al routines are patitietic for all enemy units. The game has a stereotypical ancient Egyptian rook, but everyone talks as if they're from the South or San Diego. Basically this game isn't an also ran, it's a shouldn't have ran. — Greg Fortune

Interplay, (800) INTERPLAY Windows 95 CD-ROM www.interplay.com





and you'll win every time.

ATI - it's all in the cards.



This acting an investment of 20 and 30 performance flow ATI is even lesser with the letter ATI RAGE PRO driven much son equipment with the letter ATI RAGE PRO driven make son equipment at the letter with the letter and the letter a



3D Performance Comparison - ZD 3D Winbonch98

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Diamond Vipor 330

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Diamond Monster 3D

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Diamond Monster 3D

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Berculos Stingray 128

Motrox Mystique 220

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Matrox Millenium II

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Cractive Labs Graphics Blaster

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Now You See It.



Empire Joins the Golf Wars With a Strong Contender

impire Interactive has devised a new way for PC gollers to whack the ribalis. Dubbed the MouseDrive, Empire's star creation promises a more natural, real-time atternative to the genre's Itraditional double- or Imple-click swing meter

In fact, Empire is so convinced that you'll love the MouseDrive, they've purposely omitted a swing meter alternative — a move they may regret if players don't take to the new swing mechanic.

To use MouseDrive, players simply pull back on the mouse for backswing, then push forward for the drive. Sideways movement on the to lowthrough creates hooks or silices. According to Empire, the real lime interactivity of the MouseDrive makes it possible to achieve highly technical shots, from low drives into strong winds to draws, fades, and deep bunker explosions. The free-form mechanics of MouseDrive also require the use of 12,000 frames of animation to represent more than 90 possible swifty variations.

in the Works 🕨

Practice greens and an interactive tutorial hosted by Gary Player are available to help newcomers master these advanced techniques,

Two 18-hole courses ship with the game: South Carolina's Hi ton

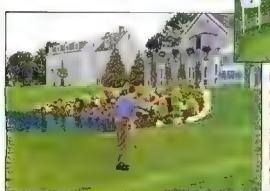
Head National, and the Jack Nicklaus designed St. Mellion International in Cornwall, England, Every anch of each course was surveyed, then height mapped with SGI workstations. The game incorporates actual turf, frees, and hazards into the course design. The results are extremely photorealistic when viewed at 640x480 at 256 colors. The courses are further enhanced with light-source shading and detailed texture-mapping.

The digitized golfers are also exceptionally well drawn. Video-captured at an increquble 200 frames. per second, the onscreen animation is fluid and lifetike. Most amazing, however is the gotters' real sticinteraction with the course graphics. In most other sims, go lens stand flat-footed, regardless of the ter rain. In Gorif Pag, onscreen golfers strike a more realistic stance that is determined by the lay of the ball in relation to turf inclines or proximity to course obstacles. For example, a bait played on the edge of a steep bunker might require that the golfer stand with one leg higher and knee bent. This is one of those small details that you never miss until you see it implemented for the first time.

Game styres include match, stroke, and lournament play, with a progressive handicapping system that automatically adjusts as your play improves. Though it's not clear from the prerelease information, Empire hints that you can also compete with professionals such as Player, Nicklaus, and Tom Watson in recorded play from actual tournaments. Other features not available for preview Include a 5 000 word shot by shot commentary, and "Play with the Pro" an interactive analysis of your golfing techniques, coached by Player Multiplayer games support up to eight players yia

modem, network, or play by email.

It should be interesting to see if simigotlers embrace Empire's MouseDrive, Even without such innovation. THE GOLF PRO looks to be another strong contender in this red not sports genre. -Scott May



confident you'll love its new MouseDrive swing mechanic, THE GOLF PAC doesn't even offer a traditional alternative. The game also features stunning high-resolution SGI-rendered graphics and multiplay for up to eight players via modem or

RODENT POWER Empire Is so network connection.

Introducing the next step in the evolution of action strategy gaming. × Multiple Views Multiplayer | Multiple Sides × Full 3D × Intuitive Interface 🔀 Intelligence Warfare from the producer of K-Wing^{TR} and Tie-Fighter^{TR} and the designer of The Super Star Wars Trilogy™ The war begins February 1998



That Is. If You Consider Hacking Up A Dwarf. Picking Up His Head And Throwing It Back At His Own Units Subtle.

Enter the world of Myth. The Fallen Lords, a three-dimensional landscape of blood-soaked hills and carnage-filled valleys:
Where the undead lurk in ambush under bridges, behind trees, submerged in swamps. Where your weary troops can see their

haggard faces reflected in the water they wade through. Where lightning blasts men into cinders, and explosions shake and scorch the ground. Where you view the horrors of war from any angle, cruising over the

battleffeld in real time. Where "realism" takes on a terrible new significance.

Call 800 295-0060 or download the demo from www.bungie.com if you feel like you're ready for the biggest uphill battle of your life.

Available for Windows* 95 and Mac* OS.

Hills, and in the Color of the color, in



Aydis of long on times to ear our states to accompany and send liabs live y across the beliefeld the way gets.



Medition and the state of the snew and and between the snew and and between the snew and and determine



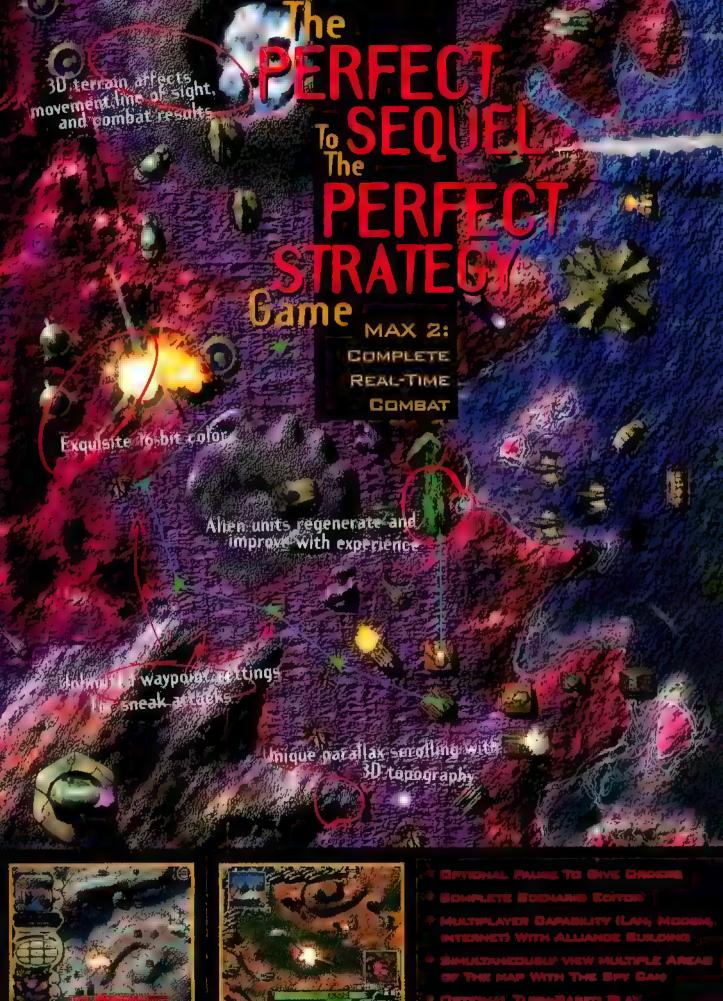
Play no diplayer games like capture the flag and king of the hill over the less counties while male not grown from submensioning convice."



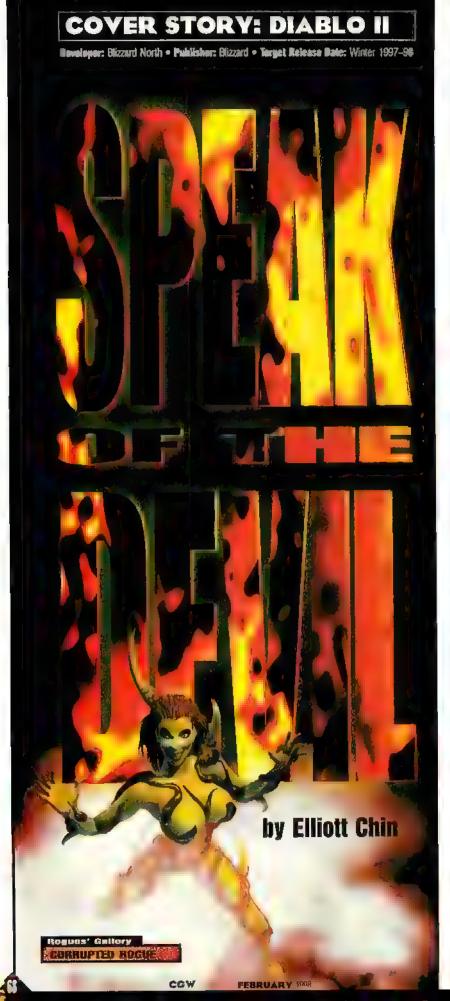
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THE FALLEN LORDS

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DIA

IABLO's gothic images of perdition masterfully condemned gamers to its dark, rich mythological world. They gladly "sold their souls" to the tune of more than a million copies. We editors even named it Computer Gaming World's 1996 Game of the Year.

Yet, there were those who welghed this rare game in the balance and found it wanting. Some claimed it to be a dumbed-down role-playing game. Others dismissed it as a mere sophisticated action game, a new Rogue or Gauntlet. Though it reinvigorated the role-playing market, many criticized it for not being a true RPG. Others objected to Blizzard's lack of foresight regarding cheating on battle.net.

To the multiplayer fans, Blizzard has promised to fix the cheating problem in Diablo II. To those who complain about Diablo's lack of RPG purity, the design team offers no quarter. Says Blizzard's David Brevik, "We didn't make an RPG, we made Diablo."

For the sequel, the Blizzard team hopes to keep DIABLO's fun hack-and-slash experience while expanding and improving the game. They don't want to appease hard-core RPG fans by adding artificial NPC interactions—they want to maintain the flavor of the original—but they also don't want DIABLO II to be just more of the same.

After talking to the Blizzard team, it's clear that they're determined to create a more immersive

BLO'S BACK

AND HE'S MAD AS HELL! Get the Scoop on His Next Reign of Terror

experience with new characters, monsters, spells, and locations while producing a true sequel with a twist.

Diabalical Plan

The twist is that the story is told and experienced from a new hero's perspective. None of the heroes from DIABLO return, and at the start of the game, even Diablo's whereabouts are unknown.

The hero from the first game, after containing Diablo's spirit and journeying to the East, succumbed to the more powerful will of the Lord of Terror. Now, Diablo is free from his entrapment below Tristram and has assumed his original appearance, but with much greater power. As the game begins, he is somewhere in the East, raising an army to conquer not just one city, but a whole game world.

Building Character

there are no reques, warriors, or sorcerers to play in Dueso II. The Lord of Terror is mightler than ever, and the previous game's heroes simply aren't up to the challenge. So Blizzard has created five new character classes. One, the Amazon, is a cross between the reque and warrior, with superior make and range attacks. Her main attacks make use of either the bow or spear. She will have five levels of abilities.

posed abilities in the hox helow. These aren't all of her abilities. and in fact, ske won't be able to learn all of them. You'll have to pick from among the lutal number, meaning that gamers will be able to customize unique characters. You might speclaffize in the spear, while your friend spe cializes in the bow. For other characters'

> abilities, see the sidebar on page 01.

each more pow-

same of the pro-

erful than the last. You can see

The Amazon's Special Abilities

- Vital and (linvi) Draves but ourse demaning shall
 - lak (appar)) Linkler, but slightly less powerful attack
- True nim (kuw) Bilara accurate, int slower shat
- (Alarmin (Annual) Terrorian maniana franchi
- Safe said (how) fire into make national latting trimmer.
- one (seem) Loss accurate hit, knocke terget bec
- iterius feximily dodge an attock
- limpsio (caese) | (rigio demano int change of destroying apon

INTO THE DARKNESS Bizzard is striving to increase realism with improved lighting effects and visibility based on line of sight. Although these early dungeons resemble shose in Divino, later environments will be more diverse. In addition to more detailed environments, the game's mechanics will be improved with true point-and-click movement.



The action in Diaglo II proceeds through four acts, with each act comprising a town and its accompanying dungeons. Each act will also tell a little more about Diablo's origins and plans, which include freeing his brothers, Baal and Mephisto. (Together they form the triumvirate known as the Prime Evils.) As the game's hero, you will have to track Diablo through each act and lown and try to prevent him from raising his army.

Your hero comes into the game as a powerful adventurer who has heard of the Lord of Terror's renewed rampage. No one from the original Diacto can help you. Since the

heroes of the

too weak to

first game were

defeat Diaglo completely, the sequel calls for all new adventurers.

As a character from one of five new class es, you start out in the mountains at the Sisters of

the Sightless Eye monastery.

Diable lans will recall that the rogue character belonged to the Sisters order. Blzzard envisions new players beginning the game here, where they'll discover that the monastery has been taken over by a tremendous evil power. The Lesser Evil Andariel, a demon from Hell, is hoping to curry favor with Diablo by conscripting the rogues into her evil army.

Andariet soon corrupts all the captured rogues, but a small band of survivors forms around the monastery, creating a makeshift camp and Diaeto It's first town,

You'll need to uncover Anderiel's hand in the fall

the

monastery and free the Sisters. When you defeat Andariel in the town's final dungeon level, you'll move on to subsequent acts and locales in the East,

Will It Be a True RPG?

One of CGW's criticisms of Diablo was that the town and nonplayer characters (NPCs) seemed too artificial and static. The streams never moved in Tristram; the NPCs were nailed to the floor; they "gave" you items by hurling them to the ground, and there were no ambient noises or background action. In addition, the role playing experiences for each character class weren't very distinct.

Although Brevik says that Slizzard never set out to make Diablo a hardcore role-playing game, they do want to make Diable II a better roleplaying experience. The develop ment team recognizes that the characters in the original game were too much at ke, distinguished only by their, weapons and character altributes. In light of this, the team is endeavoring to strengthen the game's RPG qualities in three ways: They want to make the towns more alive, integrate the NPCs further into the quests and story, and make the playing experience for each character class very different.

To make the towns more realistic, the Blizzard team plans to add planty of animation, including moving water in streams, occasional flocks

of birds, and NPCs walking in the background. Each town will have a unique cast of supporting NPCs, and these NPCs will have a wider range of motions... You'll see them moving about,

Stogues' Gallery

AND ARIES The fine is the Lesser Evils, Antonial hopes to this in the Lesser Evils, Antonial hopes to this in the lesser is the interest of the making them but are a second or the interest of the interest o



Heli's Kitchen

with David Brevik, the president of Blizzard North, to ask about the changes coming to Dianu II. Here, we've excerpted a few questions from our interview. But if you want to hear more from Brevikincluding his thoughts on Diasia place as a "real" RPG, nonhuman characters in Diable II. and cheatingread the full interview at www. computergaming.com.

GGW: How is Diaelo II different from the first game?

Brevikt Diable II is a ground-up reinvention of Diable. From a technical standpoint, we have restructured the game to run more efficiently, with better lighting and special effects. And, of course, we've addressed the cheating issue. From a gameploy standpoint,

we have made the Oracle universe much larger, with more varied experiences for the players. We want the players to feel totally immersed in the world of Diable, which means more varied tasks, more interesting NPCs, smarter foes, and more options for the player.

GGW: Will you meet any rogues, sorcerers, or warriors in Diable 11?

revile Players will encounter regues, sorcerers, and warriors during the game as NPCs and hired charoters.

CW Why is Blizzard Yord remaking everyhins—from character lass is to monsters— In Disect II?

wik: We wanted to give players an affnew experience. We will keep a few of the nonsters, such as skelptons and zembles, in some form. but they will have new Al, abilities, and weapons. I would say players can expect to see maybe 5 or 10 percent of the monsters from Diable....in regard to spells, we will keep probably about 10 percent of the spells. Some, like town portal, we'll keep out of necessity; others, like lightning, we'll keep because everyone liked them.



acting like real people, doing things that you'd expect of them. That means the blacksmith could come out of his shop periodically to greet you (unfortunately, Blizzard doesn't plan to allow entry into buildings). I've been assured that when NPCs give you an item, they't hand it to you, just as a person in real life would.

NPCs will also have a larger role in the game. You won't go to them only when you need healing or some new items. Instead, you'll be able to learn spells and special fighting ab lities from them, probably in exchange for the completion of a quest. They'll also be more useful in providing background for the game's story.

The most exciting NPC development is that you will be able to hire NPCs to join you on your adventures. They won't follow you through the entire game, but they will accompany you temporarily, perhaps through one

act You will be able to hire only one NPC at a time, and they't have their own personalities and agenda. You won't control them, but they will fight on your behalf. Some NPCs will join you simply for money, others might join if you complete a certain quest. The Bl.zzard team is varying the NPCs and their backgrounds, and assures that those who join you will fit into the quest and story structure of the game.

Finally, although Diablo [I will be an allnew game, some of your favorite NPCs will return. At this point, Deckard Cain and Wirt are slated for cameos.

Just Questing

For the actual quests, the Bitzard team is creating more special-location quests, similar to the Bone Chamber, Poisoned Water Supply, and King Leone's Tomb in Diablo. That means more quests will be in separate Tocations, accessible through the dungeon yet taking place in self-contained environments.

GIGHEAD Those monsters that leafs of lightning from their pipe and plactic. Their placeholder names well change before the final release of lines it.

And since the sequel contains four towns instead of Diablo's one, you can expect a lot more quests. Quests will not change depending on your character class, but they will still be randomized. How you acquire quests won't be very different, but Blizzard says they'll be better integrated into the story and your character's development. Completed quests in Diablo II will reveal more of the back-story, free NPCs to join your party, or allow you to learn new fighting techniques.

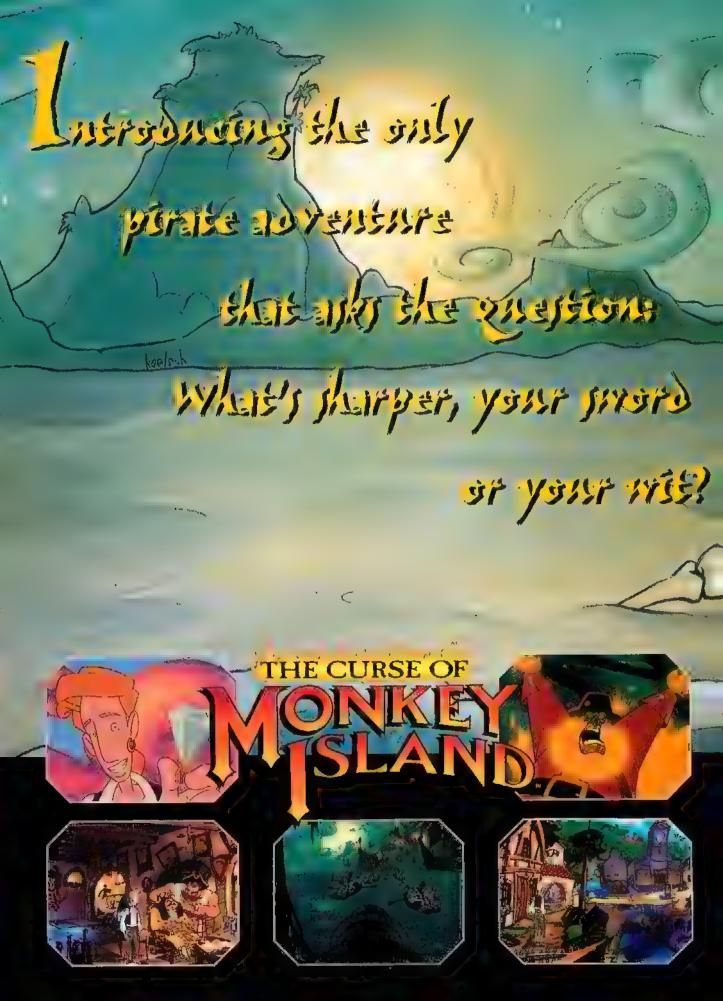
All the quests will be available in both single and multiplayer games. The idea is to allow multiple gamers to play through the entire game together.

The tolks at Blizzard showed us four of the proposed quests for the first act. Two of these, the Den of Evil and



A NEW LOOK You can see how the interface has changed in Dwalo II, which will have a larger game view and no status bar.

the Forgotten Tower, involve rooting out infested buildings and questing for treasure. The other two, Field of Slones and Sisters Burial Ground, deal more with the act's main storyline, in Field of Stones, you'll have to revive a defunct circle of mystic stones, which ancient



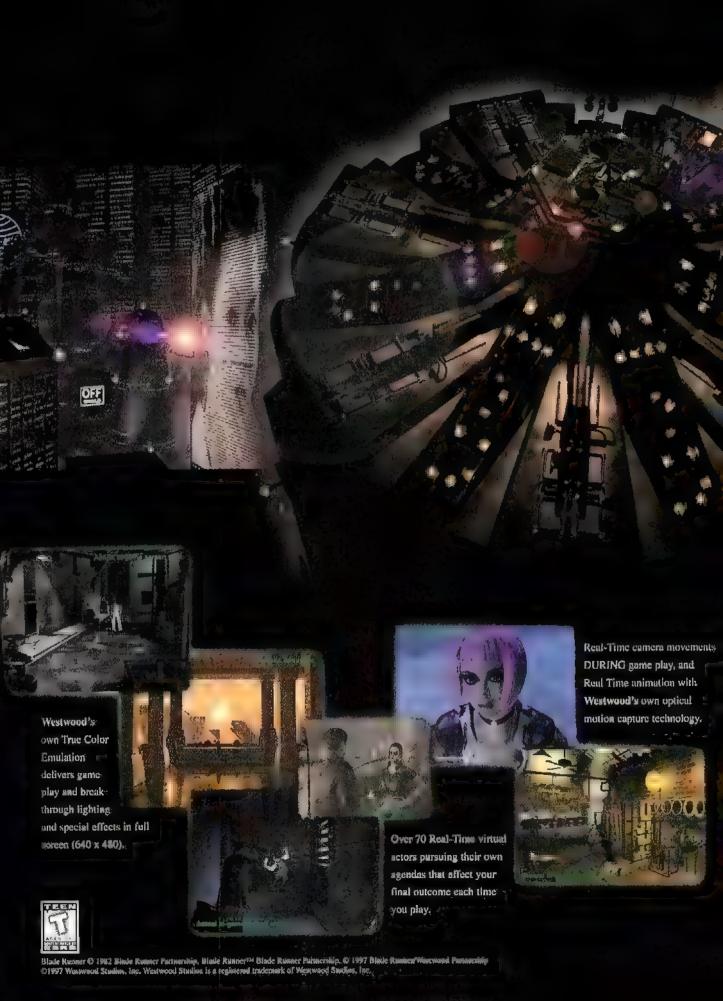


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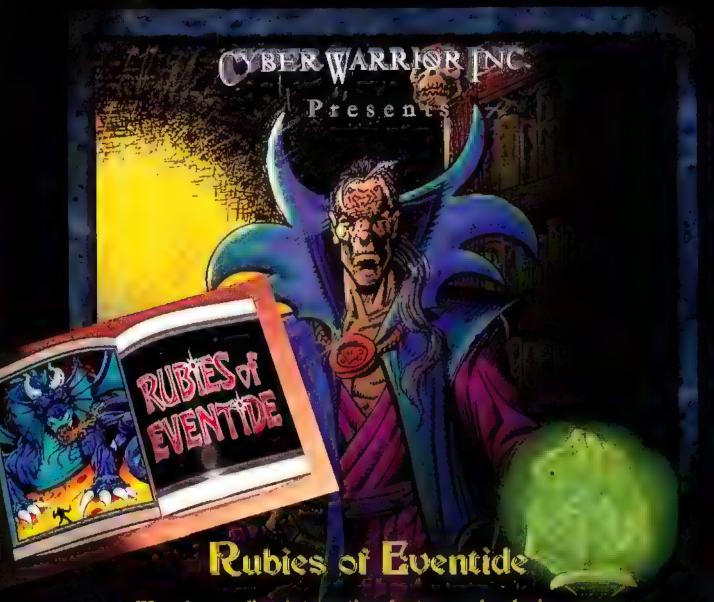
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mages once used to teleport to far off realms. Restoring the stones could give you the ability to visit Tristram or enlist the aid of Deckard Cain, the storyteller from Diasto. In the Sisters Burial Ground quest, you'll go to the monastery's burial grounds, where you'll find that dead rogues have been resurrected by Andariet's magic.

Going to Town

Diablo II will boast a far greater scope than Diablo. This time, you're questing to save an entire world, not just a town. Each of Diablo II's four towns will have one main dungeon, several subdun geons, and a surrounding wilderness area that can be fully explored. And, according to codesigner Eric Schaefer, each town will have as much gameplay as all of Diablo.

Towns will be arrayed in linear fashion, meaning that you'll have to finish one town before you can move on to the next. But, once you finish clearing a town, you can return to it later. Certain quests will span several towns, requiring you to travel back and lorth, probably by caravan or

teleport.

Multiplayer Changes

DIABLO II

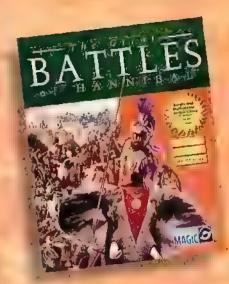
District was named the 1998 Game of the Year in part because of its seamless internet play and multiplayer support. While the multiplay was good, it was evershadowed by incessant cheating.

Bilizzard says (it is committed to addressing the problem, and codesigner Eric Schaefer promises, "We will solve the cheating." Schaefer wan't reveal details though, partly because the team is still working on solutions and partly because they don't want to give away their plans to prospective cheaters.

Blizzard says it will increase the maximum number of players, possibly up to eight. Most important, the entire game will be available in multiplayer games. Every quest will be playable in single- and multiplayer modes. Difficulty levels will be taken out of the multiplayer game. Since each successive town gets progressively harder, Blizzard saes no need to add difficulty levels.



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DIABLO II

Although Blizzard is being coy about the three other towns, they will say that each has a unique flavor and environment. One act will take place in the desert, possibly in a Horadrim town, with a few resident sorcerers. Another act will take place in a jungle environment

Each town will also have a powerful end boss. Andariel will be the main villain in the monastery town and Diablo will be the final boss, but who are the other two? Stizzard wants that to be a surprise.

Fantastic Five

Like the settings, the character classes will be more diverse this time around. There will now be five classes-two spell casters, two fighters, and one hybrid—and each will play differently. The attributes list will stay the same, but combat will change. While spellcasters will have a melee weapon and a range of spells, fighters will have a repertoire of fighting moves that will rival the mage spells for diversity. These moves will, Ineffect, replace spells for these melee characters. (The fighters will be able to cast a few spells, but anly through the use of scrolls or staves.) The hybrid class should have a mix of spells and fighting moves.

> By giving each class a wide range of fighting abilities and spells that no other class can use, Blizzard



BACK IN ACTION DIABLO !! promises many new feetures, including all-new nasties like this beast, which Blizzard calls "Bighead,"

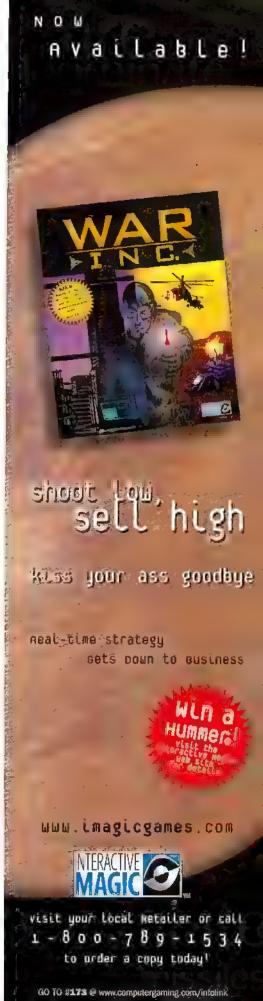
> Ing experience for each character different. Each class will also be customizable. because not every player will be able to mas ter the fighting moves of every class. Two players could thus create characters of the same class but with very different lighting abilities (see the two character sidebars, pages 69 and 81)

DIABLO II will also boast a host of new spells and monsters. Only a few monsters from Division will be back, and each fown will have its own mix of monsters.

Altered States

Aside from making high concept changes, Blizzard's development team is also overhauling the engine and interface. The new engine is already running, and it looks better than the or ginal. There was some talk of a new 3D engine, but that was scrapped in favor of the more familiar 2D engine.







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DIABLO III

Character Class Spells and Abilitles

Here's a sampling of the new spells that some diasses will possess

Whirlwind: Wind attack that strikes all squares around character

Zealetry: Lowers speed, but boosts attack strength and bit points

Enchant: Makes target sword hame land makes other weapons magical

Glasial Spikar A cold spike that freezes land

Summon Bleed Selem Blood acien notice to in control you

Wall-of Marie (2) Shipsesadis and Min older the courts

Control Manaters lengthway turns a monster uto an ally

same, the graphics are now much cleaner and more detailed. The lighting will be blend ed better for more realistic shadows. Also, the environment is being enlarged. You'll remember that the walls and doors in Diablo were only slightly talter than your characters. but in Diable II the walfs will loom, giving the entire dungeon a more foreboding appear ance. Blizzard has also Implemented true transparencies (rather than dithering) when a character walks behind a wall.

Characters will now enjoy true line-ofsight. Only the objects in the character's direct line of sight will be visible. No more seeing through doors or walls, even if they are directly in front of you

Blizzard says that dungeons will be more interactive, with more traps and breakable objects, including stained glass windows The graphics will also shift away from being

gamers' cries and will add a "Run" feature to your character's movement options.

Hell to Baise

There are still some things that Blizzard is keeping secret. Of course, this early in the development cycle, there is much that still hasn't been finalized. As more details are revealed, we'll bring you updates. For now the Blizzard team is working hard on the first act, and promises that each successive act will only get better. They're also mindfur of the shipping pains of Diagle and have built in plenty of months for play testing. At this point, they've got great deas and an impressive-looking engine and first dungeon. The rest remains to be seen, but the folks at Blizzard have never let us down before. I doubt they it start with D.ABLO II. %





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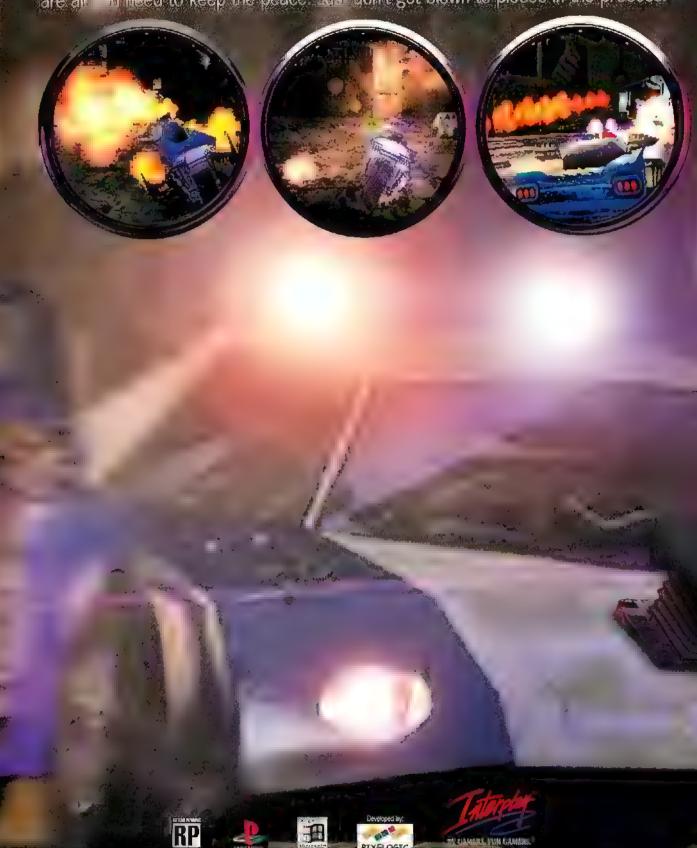
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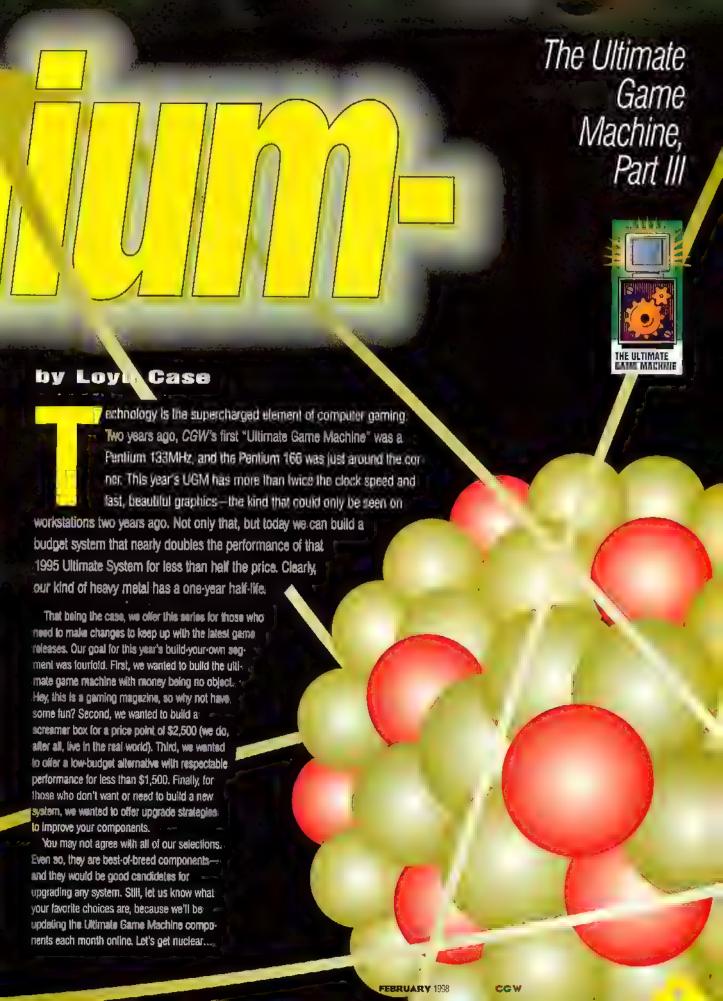
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Big Budget, Low Budget, or No Budget— Here's What You Need to Build a Gaming Dynamo





magine, for a moment, that you had deep pockets, and could indulge your every whim in building a thermonuclear gaming rig. What would it look like?

We like to keep the perspective on gaming.
For example, several people suggested that we

For example, several people suggested that we pick the Fujitsu Plasmavision 42-Inch, flat panel display. We considered it, but there are problems with flat-panel displays for gaming. For one thing, switching resolutions tends to result in either shrunken or ugly images. This is, after all, the Ultimate Game Machine, not the ultimate workstation or the ultimate home lheater.

The Core

There are six components that make up the core of a PC, the processor, the motherboard, the memory, the case and power supply, the CD-ROM drive, and the floppy drive. We'il give you a quick update on developments in each area, and then explain our choices. For the purposes of this article, we'll call the high-end system the Melidown and the midrange system Heavy Metal. (The \$1,500 system follows in a sidebar on page 112.)

Processor In the last few months, we look a look at a lot of CPU alternatives. Cyrix was out, even on the budget box. It just didn't deliver the goods for high-performance



STILL THE ONE Though AMD and Cynx are working on improving their floating-point performance, the Pentum I remains the champion of the day

gaming. There's a myth that having a fast 3D accelerator neutralizes the Pentium II's floating-point advantage, but it's just that: a myth. You still need to generate the polygons and do the lighting transforms and the geometry—and that takes serious floating-point performance. AMD was a more interesting choice, but we didn't have a chance to look at one of the new VIA-equipped AGP Socket 7 motherboards, so it's also out. The AMD chip is more of a consideration if your budget is very, very tight, although it's still not as good a floating-point performer as the Intel line (as our 3D WinBench tests last summer indicated).

For the Me toown machine, the CPU choice was a no-brainer: the 300MHz Pentium II. The Heavy Metal's CPU proved more of a

offemma. Luckily, we were able to take advantage of some towered prices, so the Heavy Metal is still a Penhum II, but at 233MHz.

Motherboard Motherboards are a critical part of any system. Low-ball motherboards can actually hurt system performance—or result in flaky behavior. Nothing rulins an immersive experience more than getting dumped out of the game with a "blue screen o' death" error.

Motherboard technology is rapidly evolving. Microsoft, Intel, and Compaq are busy getting out the PC 98 specification, which will completely reshape PC systems, and the use of FireWire (IEEE 1394) for mass storage and USB for keyboards, mice, and controllers will reshape the way systems are configured. Until then, though, systems integration is still something of a puzzle.

For once, we were able to ride the technology curve on our motherboard choices. Both systems use ATX-format, AGP boards using

Intel's 440LX chipset. When moving to ATX format motherboards, you'll have the ability to shut down your

ONE FAST MOTHER: Board, that is. The Supermicro P6DLS' second Slot 1 CPU interface leaves your machine with room to grow. whole system from Windows. Although it cuts the slot count to seven, ATX has prelty much become the standard. It offers better cooling and good support for full-sized expansion cards. The new LX chipset is somewhat faster than the older 440FX chipset, and it supports SDRAM and UltraDMA/33 hard drives.

The Meltdown uses Supermicro's P6DLS mainboard, which is actually a dual-processor board, but we used just a single CPU, since Windows 95 can use only one processor. However, when NT 5.0 ships, with full DirectX and mulliprocessor support, we can add a second CPU. The Supermicro board is a little rough around the edges—documentation is pretty skimpy—but it's kind of like the difference between a Dodge Viper and a Mustang 5.0 fter We know which one's faster.

The Heavy Metal uses the very nice, easy to set up, ASUS P2L97 AGP motherboard. This puppy has one AGP slot, five PCI slots (yes live), and a pair of ISA slots (one ISA/PCI pair is shared). The Pentium II slides neatly into the Slot 1 socket on the board. Early ver sions of this board had the ability to set the CPU clock in the BIOS, but alas, the new versions have returned to jumpers for speed setting. One minor downside to this board is that the location of the connector strip for the power switch and reset button prevents you from installing a long ISA card in the last slot, defeating (in part) the advantage of the ATX format.

Wemory One surprise you'll run into when configuring memory is that the form factor is changing once again. All of the new motherboards we looked at had only DIMM sockets. All those 72-pin SIMMs you ve invested in can now be used to mark your place in the 688(i) manual, Most DIMMs these days are SDRAM, although you can find EDO DiMMs. Unless you have a burning need for parity modules, SDRAM seems to be the way to go. We've heard rumors of parity SDRAM, but haven't seen it yet. As for ECC (error correcting) memory modules, don't bother unless you're doing something mission critical, ECC actually results in a minor performance hit.

The rule of thumb for memory is this. Get what you can afford. Since we didn't have a budget for the Meltdown, we dropped in

64MB of Crucial Technologies 10 nanosecond (ns) SDRAM—more than enough memory for just about any gaming need today. The 10ns speed of the SDRAM isn't fully used by the 440LX chipset, which still only runs a 66MHz system clock. Sometime in early- to mid-1998, expect to see systems with 100MHz system clocks as a matter of course.

The Heavy Metal uses a single 32MB SDRAM DIMM, leaving two empty slots for future memory expansion.

If *One* CPU is Good



POINT OF FACT Windows 95 can support only a single CPU, but DirectX is also migrating to Windows NT, which supports multiple CPUs, it can't hurt to have an extra slot

any people are thinking about multiprocessing these days. In fact, this year's Ultimate Game Machine has a dual CPU motherboard, although it uses only a single CPU (for the time being).

Windows 95 is part of the problem. Windows 95 (and Windows 98, for that matter) will support only a single CPU. Adding another one would be a waste. However, DirectX 6.0 will be fully integrated into Windows NT 5.0, and NT has supported multiprocessing for several revisions now. The thought of a pair of 300MHz processors has our mouths watering in the most Paylovian sense.

But there's a downside to using any version of NT. Older Win 95 games may not run, even with DirectX support, and DOS games almost certainly won't run. For the most obsessive gamer, the solution is to have a dual boot NT 5.0/Windows 98 setup. This will probably be the hot ticket for the high end gamer by the end of '98. After all, it's only disk space.









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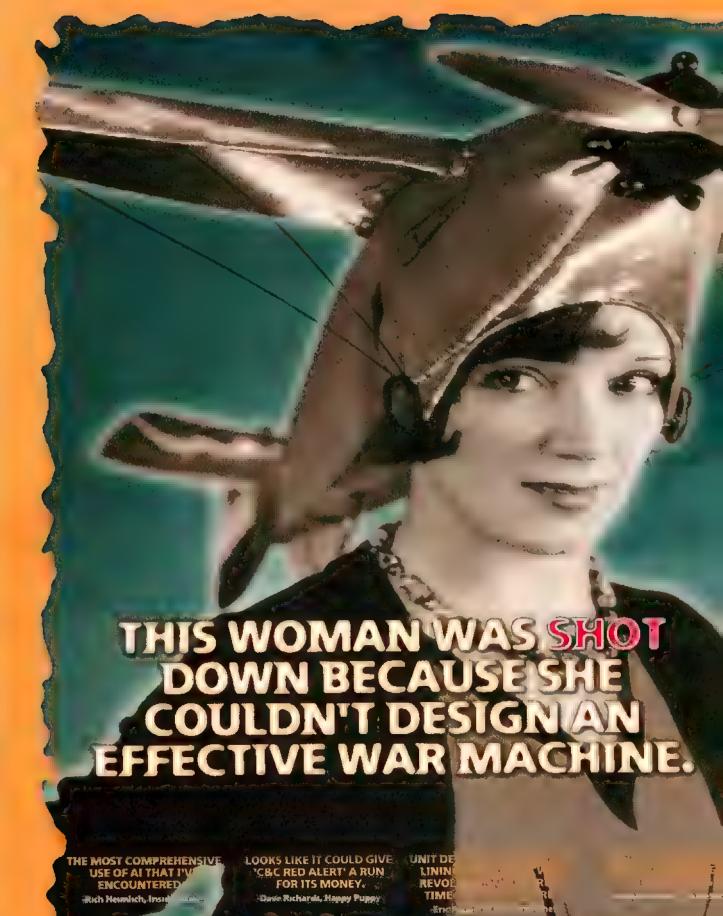
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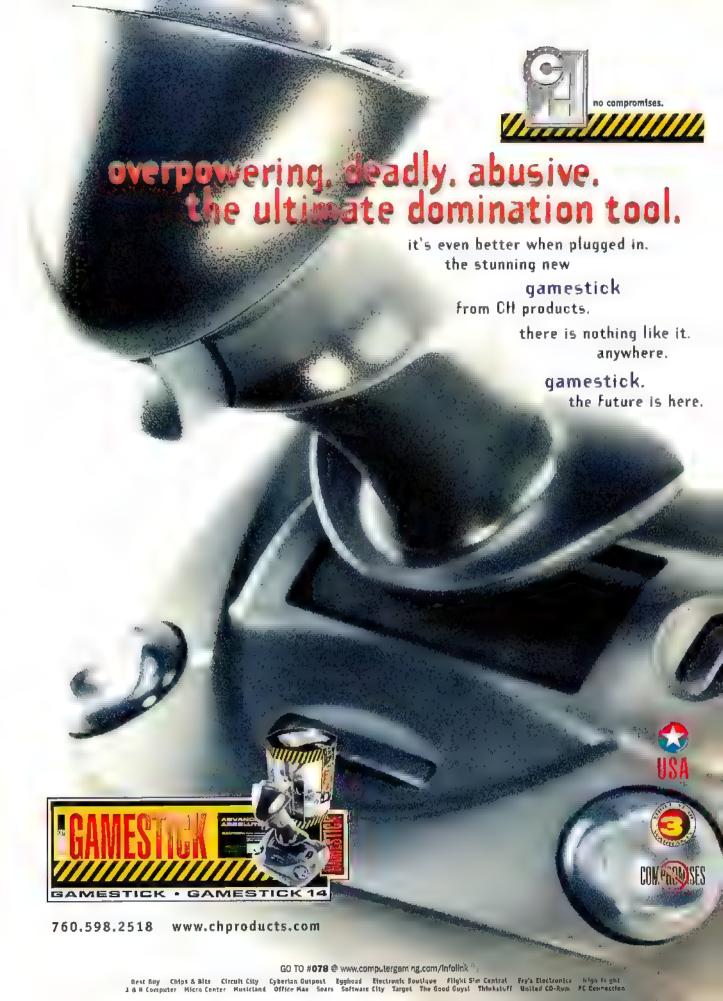
ZOOM OUT.

THEN ZOOM OUT.

(Whe too paints 71d)



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Case and Power Supply The power supply is PC Power & Cooling's Turbocool 300 ATX, which delivers rock-solid power and reliably high current loads. The Melldown's case comes from the folks at JDR Microdevices. About an inch taller than last year's case, it has the removable motherboard tray and lots of internal expansion. It also has stols to install a mullin lan



MORE POWER, SCOTTY Be sure your power supply is raied to al least 230 watts.

that can blow air across the hard drive—essential cooling for the drives we chose.

We found a case/power supply combo for the Heavy Metal at a local clone shop for only \$79. It has a 230-watt power supply and a slide-out motherboard tray. It's even slightly larger than most midsize towers. The shop couldn't tell us the manufacturer, but these kinds of cases are widely available: we recommend you get an ATX case with at least 230 walls of power.

CD-ROW Drives At the high end, once again, there's no contest. Plextor is now shipping a 32x CAV CD-ROM drive with an ultra-SCS

Continued on page 98



PLEX YOUR GAMING MUSCLE Plextor comes out on top again here with its 32x CAV CD ROM,

Hard Drive: Speed Without Jungier's

or the Melidown, we wanted speed without compromise. The obvious choice here was Seagate's Cheetah 10,000RPM, Ultra-Wide SCSI hard drive. It then occurred to us that if one Cheetah is good, two must be better. Scouting around, we came across Mytex's Flashpoint DW, which is an Ultra-Wide, dual-channel, SCSI host adapter with built in support for RAID 0 and RAID 1. RAID 1 is of no interest for gaming—who needs redundant data storage for Longsow 2? But if you've ever waited for if-22 to load, a speedy hard drive seems less of a luxury and more of a necessity. So we used the

Flashpoint host adapter and a pair of 4.5GB Cheetahs to create a single RAID 0 volume, which stripes data across two drives (in 64KB increments, in our case), in effect, you're using two drives as a single drive, doubling the width of the data path, it doesn't really double throughput, but it does speed things up a lot. For example, a single Cheetah gets around 1,700 on WinBench 97's Business Disk WinMark, whereas the dual Cheetahs configured as a RAID 0 device punch the result to a shade over



RAID ON Mylex's DW (top right), part of its Flashpoint family, allows you to stripe multiple drives as a single volume.

2,000. Two Cheetahs run a lad warm. Okay, they're hotter than a nuclear rod—but that's why we have a case that has a cooling fan blowing right across the hard-drive stots. Another downside is that if one drive fails, you lose everything.

The hard drive for the Heavy Metal is slightly more conservative: Seagale's new 7,200RPM UltraDMA/33. This baby is backward compatible with EIDE, but the 7,200RPM rotational speed really kicks in with UltraDMA/33's 33MB/sec burst-transfer rate. It also sports an access time of under 10ms. With a whopping 6.4GB of storage, it's no slouch in the capacity department, either, it uses technologies such as magnetoresistive heads to cram data into as few platters as possible. You gottal love that





way that we tested the roll-your own systems in much the same way that we tested the off the shelf systems. These tests included WinBench 97, 3D WinBench 97, CBench, and a slew of games. To test 3D performance, we used F IGHT SIMULATOR 98, GL QUAKE, WIPEOUT XL and Moto RACER. We tested Windows DirectDraw performance by running WinQuake with the inowindirect option. For DOS games, we used Quake and Duke Nokem 3D.

We enabled Flight Simulator 98's frame-rate counter by pressing the

Shift key and the letter Z twice in succession (Shift-ZZ). We captured the frame rate at the start of the built-in FS98 features video, but it's best to watch the whole playback. FS98 is linicky



about MIP-mapping, so you can see all kinds of interesting behavior with some cards. You can enable Winfout XL's frame rate counter by typing

Benchmark Tests

	Business Graphics WinMark 1024x768x16	Business Graphics WinMark 800x600x24	3D WinBench
Falcon Northwest Mach V ¹	150	155	266
CGW Melidown Machine	128	131	259
Dell XPS D233 ²	97	97	199
CGW Heavy Metal Rig	107	108	206
	WinQuake TimeDemos at	GL QUAKE TimeDemos at 640x480	DOS QUAKE TimeDemos at 640x480
	640x480	DAUXAGU	
Falcon Northwest Mach V ¹	28.4	54.3	31.2
Falcon Northwest Mach V ¹ CGW Meltdown Machine	28.4	71.0	31.2
	28.4	54.3	31.2

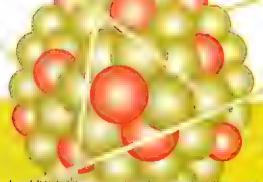
^{*} GL Drivers Not Available at Press Time

¹ The Falcon Mach V is as tested in our December Issue, Pentium II 300MHz with 128MB of RAM with a list price of \$8,495

² The Dell XPS D233 is as tested in our January issue: Pentium II 233MHz with 32MB of RAM with a list price of \$2,379.

"framerate" at the race screen, Moro Racen is more complex. You need to have the De phine-manufactured version (blue CD), not the Electronics Arts, manufactured version (white CD). Enable the frame counter by starting the game from a DOS window and typing "moto-likimnop." When in a race screen, bit Shift F1 (function key 1). The frame rate we published was at the opening of the default race.

We took all the Quake numbers by averaging the results of TimeDemos 1, 2, and 3. We set the resolution to 640x480, with the



status bar visible, but the screen otherwise maximized. We ran Duke Nukew 3D by typing "duke3o-m" s3 /11" at the DOS prompt, then typing DNRATE after Duke's ship crashes.

Noticeably absent this year are any tests at a standard 320x200 VGA-graphics resolution. The last games I can recal, that required this were Daggerfall, and the DOS version of Reb Alert.

WinBench 97 CD-ROM WinMark	WinBench 97 CPU32	WinBench 77 CPU16
1500	765	587
1500	776	587
1530	569	441
1320	598	456
CD-ROM WIRMarks	CPU WinMarks	CPU WinMarks
Moto Racer Initial Frame Rate	FLIGHT SIMULATOR 98 Frame Rate	Wipeout XL Initial Frame Rate
63	37	30
64	38	42
52	30	40
60	32	47 [
Frames Per Second	Frames Per Second	Frames Per Second 🌣

LUTONIUM

Sookgued from page 95 interface. With a minimum 14x CD speed. 20MB/sec over the Ultra SCSI interface, and

a sub-90ms access time, this drive's performance approaches that of some hard drives.

The Heavy Metal's CD ROM drive is the Goldstar CR-8241B EIDE CD-ROM drive. It's a slot-roading drive, only costs \$90 by mail order, has a 90ms access time, and scores over 1,300 on ZD's WinBerich CD-ROM test. IL supports Mode 2 DMA, reducing the CPU utilization to 16 percent—not bad for an IDE CD-ROM dave.

Floppy Drive We

rounded out both systems with a lowly 3.5 Inch, 1.44MB floopy drive made by TEAC.

Graphics

Next to the CPU, graphics hardware has become the most critical component for today's generation of 3Daccelerated games. Not into 3D shooters? What about (light sims? What about strategy games? Every genre of gaming is beginning to make some use of 30 graphics.

We filled the AGP slot in the Meltdown with the STB Velocity 128 AGP. We've been very impressed with the effort STB has been putting into its driver releases, so we

gave the STB card the nod for our big rig. The RIVA 128 chip on the Velocity 128 is CPU constrained. Even a 300MHz CPU can't deliver enough

polygons to stress the RIVA's rendering ability. But the RIVA 128 chip isn't enough. There are still a lot of games written only for 3Dfx. Since money was no object, we picked a Quantum 3D Obsidian 100SB, which is a 3Dfx board. The 100SB is a new version of the two-board setup used in Falcon Northwest's premier Mach V system.

With the lower-cost rig, we still wanted a really hot graphics subsystem-and, surprisingly, we didn't have to compromise much. The primary (AGP) card is the ASUS 3DexPlorer. Although we gave it only 3.5 stars in last month's review, ASUS has since released new drivers that seem pretty solid, and the 3dexPlorer now has a software control

> TECHNO-LUST For those who need colossat fill rate. Quantum 3D's Obsidian 100SB should feed the need

Everything is now on one board, with its own PCI bridge chip. At the time we tested it, the DirectX drivers were still a little unstable, but GL Quake's performance was nothing short of incredible. With a little tweaking, it posted over 70 frames per second (fps). Watching the benchmark time demos using the 3D Obsidian 100SB was like watching an old Keystone Kops movie.

card using Rendition's new V2200 chip, but products weren't available in time.

panel. Nonetheless, we still wanted a 3Dfx card, and that was an easy choice: the Canopus Pure3D

One of the interesting points of the 440LX chipset was supposed to be its improved throughput. This may well be, but the DOS praphics performance we saw initially looked weak, despite the strong VGA-graphics core of the RIVA 128. The issue with the Pentium II, as with last year's Pentium Pro, is throughput. The Pentium II is capable of write posting, linear frame-buffer (LFB) write combining, and banked VGA-graphics write combining. These features enable the Pentium II to pump VGA graphics data over the PCI bus in big bursts, rather than in small driblets. Unfortunately, the ASUS motherboard has no way of turning on these features, so we had to resort to that old standby, FastVid, The AMI BIOS on the Supermicro board is a tweaker's delight. All the features needed to boost DOS graphics performance could be set in the BIOS.

1-2 PUNCH ASUS' 3DexPlorer and Canopus' Pure3D are a very hard combination to beat.



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Micron systems powered the recent QuakeCon '97 competition. There, chief organizer Jim (H2H) Elson said: "Among the hard-core Quake fans on the Internet, it's long been established that Micron machines are peerless when it comes to performance and reliability,"

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Monitor Of course, you need a monitor to be able to see the games. This was one of our toughest choices. At first, flat panel options seemed intriguing, but we discarded that idea after determining that ali of them still have a fixed pixel count. If you've ever seen a 1024x768 flat-panel display interpolate pixels to mandle a 640x480 game, you know what we mean. "Egly" doesn't begin to cover it. A flat panel needs to be built with a lixed number of pixels. If you have a flat panel that can handle high resolutions (1024x768, say), then one of two things will happen when it shifts to 640x480. Either you'il get a very small 640x480 image in the center of the flat panel, or it will sum real pixels to make ugly, rarge ones.

The next option we looked at was one of those really big CRTs, such as the Mitsubishi 37-inch. This was pretty intriguing, but we sit close to the monitor with keyboard, mouse, and controllers when we play. Sit down a foot away from one of these big screens and it feels like you are craning your neck the whole time. We then went to a conventional 21-inch monitor. Here, there are several choices. We fill ried briefly with the Mitsubishi 91TXM. It's a very nice, aperture grill monitor with a .28-inch stripe pitch. But we then saw a 24-inch (22.5-inch displayable) Sony GDM-W900.

Backup

ames don't need to be backed up, but backing up your Windows system and any other

useful data is a very good Idea, fape backup is tedious at best, so we popped in Syquest's S'



The W900 is really designed for CAD or desktop publishing. It has a 16:10 aspect ratio, meaning that it's wider than a conventional monitor (HDTV is 16:9; normal computer CRIs are 4:3). At first, we were still a little relictant. There's a visible blank area on either side of the picture when running at standard resolutions (kind of a letterbox effect). The display area is still a little larger than 21 inches, but not enormously so. It also costs \$4,500, which is, by itself, the cost of

a good computer. Moto RACER has a 16'9 option for its gameplay, but it really doesn't look that great. I'm aware of no other game that supports 16:9 or 16:10. We were about to drop the W900 from our list, when a friend came over and sat in front of the screen. "I want this monitor!" he exclaimed in an awestruck voice.

That was all the justification we needed.

As for our Heavy Metal rig, we really wanted to get a 17-inch monitor, and

so we settled on the Optiquest Q71 (Optiquest is Viewsonic's budget line). It's a nice monitor, though the clicking of the electro-

mechanical relay when it's switching resorbtions is a little disconcerting. The picture is sharp, but the onscreen controls are not very intuitive. Still, it's fairly bright, has a .28mm dot pitch and costs only \$450.

Sound

Some of the coolest moments in computer gaming are in the game audio. Hearing the sound effects in LucasArts' THEIR FINEST HOUR was incredible. Audio is one of the three cornerstone technologies that enable a great gaming experience (along with fast processors and great graphics).

Continued on page 112

The Future of Performance

ance that never remains constant. Last year, the bottleneck was the graphics system. This year, it's the CPU. Even a 300MHz Pentium II can't saturate a RIVA 128 card. Next year, as game developers begin upping their budget for texture maps, bandwidth over the bus may become the bottleneck. One potential solution is to move some geometry calculations, such as lighting transforms, onto the graphics card. However, DirectX 6.0 doesn't took as if it will support hardware acceleration of geometry at this stage. OpenGL certainty is capable of this, but whether consumer-level cards will arrive that can accelerate geometry is, as yet, unknown.

CPU Performance CPU performance will soon be open to reexamination as well. Unfortunately, it's looking as If market fragmenta tion may well happen. AMO has announced the K6 3D CPU, which is scheduled to ship around mid-1998. It adds a lot of performance-boosting features and an improved floating-point unit. However, the "3D" in the name refers to a set of proprietary extensions designed to speed up 3D transforms. Integrated Device Technology (IDT) surprised everyone with its Centaur C6 CPU. The C6 is a poor floating-point performer, but IDT is feverishly working on a C6+ that speeds up floating-point and adds its

own spin on speeding up 3D. Of course, Intel is working on MMX2 (just don't ask the folks at Intel about it). Current MMX instructions are 16-bit in nature, and MMX2 is rumored to be a full 32 bit instruction set. It's interesting to see how all these companies are attaching a great deal of importance to 3D graphics.

Also on the Intel Front There will likely be a new Pentsum II coming out that will support a 100MHz system clock and run at 350 and 400MHz. On the chipset side, intel's 440BX chipset is supposed to also support a 100MHz bus clock. VIA has added a new chipset that enables Socket 7 boards to have AGP, but whether this will really offer any performance boost is open to question. Also on the horizon is 4x AGP, which is theoretically capable of moving data to the graphics card from memory at up to 1GB/sec. This begs the quest on of memory bandwidth. Even SDRAM might have trouble keeping up. By then, though, Intel will begin implementing RAMBUS technology in mainstream systems. RAMBUS is a patented RAM technology licensed by a lot of DRAM vendors that enables very-high-speed memory transfers, but won't see system memory duty until sometime in 1999. And when the first IA-64 CPU (code-named Merced) debuts that same year, all bels are off.











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Upgrade Strategies

ou may be reading all this and saying, "I'm just not ready to get a whole new system," or "I could get a whole new system," or "I could get a whole new system,...or I could stay married." The good news is that upgrading a component here and there can breathe life into your existing system; and with a well-thought-out upgrade strategy, you can go three to five years—or maybe longer—before buying an entirely new system.

The key word here is triage, a technique doctors use to treat wounded soldiers. It's a fairly simple idea: Treat the most critically wounded patient first, and take care of the lighter injuries later. The same strategy,can be applied to upgrading your machine. Take a look at our Upgrade Table here, and see where your system components rate. They're listed in order of importance.

For killer game performance, upgrading the most ailing component among your CPU, memory, and graphics will deliver the most immediate increase in gaming performance. A couple of notes here; if you're running a 166MHz Pentium or better, you should consider upgrading your 2D/3D graphics first to get more out of your rig, since CPUs of this horsepower or better still have a good bit of life left in them. If you're happy with your current 2D board, and it has 4MB of onboard memory, consider a 3D-only board using the 3Dfx Voodoo chipsel, though a PowerVR-based board isn't a bad choice for gamers on a tighter budgel. In purchasing a 2D/3D board, 4MB of onboard memory is an absolute minimum, and given that Dlamond's Stealth II costs only about \$120, there's no reason to skimp here.

Moving to the storage components, if you've outgrown your current hard drive, that's a pretty obvious reason to upgrade to a bigger one. Disk storage space has never been cheaper: For under \$400, you can pack 6.4GB of storage into your box, and for around \$200, Seagate has a 3.2GB drive, though it doesn't support UltraDMA/33. We recommend drives that support UltraDMA/33, even if your current motherboard doesn't support it, so that when you do get a new motherboard, you can get some improvement in hard drive performance as well.

A faster CD-ROM drive can certainly speed up game installs and scene loads, but it's fess of a critical system component. But in addition to faster performance, many CD-ROM drives ship with a bus mastering driver that cuts down on CPU usage, which can help overall game performance. However, unless you're CD-ROM is really gasping, upgrade other components first.

If you're not into online multiplayer gaming, faster data communications may not be an issue. A modern upgrade will make Web browsing less painful, and as our recent tests showed, the 56K moderns have somewhat lower latency numbers than 28.8 V.34 moderns. ISDN is the medium of choice for online gaming, but its associated costs may make it less appealing.

Upgrading won't always bring you the across the board speedup that an entirely new system will, but it can certainly add life to aging systems. And after you've bought enough upgrades, you'll basically have wound up with a new system, but on a much more manageable payment plan. —Dave Salvator

UPGRADE CHART			
Component	If You Have	Budget Upgrade	Performance Upgrade
CPU F	Pentlum 120MHz or sigwer	MMX OverDrive 200MHz (budget)*	Pentium II 300
Memory	8-16MB	32MB EDO DRAM (If your system can run SDRAM)	64MB SDRAM
3D Graphics	None Installed	Diamond Stealth II	3Dfx-hased board (3D-only) or STB Velocity 128
20 Graphics	Card with 1-2MB local memory	Diamond Stealth (i	STB Velocity 128
Hard Drive	1GB drive or less	Seagate 6.4GB UltraDMA/33	Seagate 4.5GB Cheetah Ultra-Wide SCSI
Communications	14.4K or 28.8K modem	Global Village (X2 56K) or Diamond SupraExpress (K56Flex 56K)	Diamond NetCommander (ISDN)
CD-ROM	2-4x drive	EIDE Goldstar CR-8241B	U/W SCSI Plextor 32x CAV

*Note: If your motherboard won't accept an upgrade CPU, go with a new LX-based motherboard with a P-II 233MHz. Even though it's an AGP motherboard, your PCI bards will work fine.

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Everything the Panther offers... plus a premium flight stick, built-in throttle and 17 programmable buttons.

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Team Madcatz presents the Panther and Panther XL. Made from the finest ingredients the science of War has to offer. Don't ask how we did it... ask what it can do for you. Because in 3D combat, as in controller design, there's only one philosophy: By any means necessary.





Continued from page 104

Sound Cards The Melidown needed something a little out of the ordi-

needed something a litt nary. We started with a stock Diamond Monster Sound Then we ripped out the tiny wavetable card that's attached. (WARNING: If you do this, it will probably void your



PLUTONIUM

warranty.) The little connector on the Monster Sound is, in fact, Wave Blaster-compatible. We then added a Roland SCD-15 Sound Canvas daughtercard, securing it to the Monster Sound with ordinary rubber bands. The MiDI music quality that results is quite a bit better than Monster's stock 2MB wavelable.

The cool thing about the Monster Sound, of course, is its use of Aureal Technologies' 3D positional audio, which definitely adds to the experience in a game like JEDI KNIGHT. Using HRTF (head-related transfer functions) to simulate positional audio, Aureal achieves its positional 3D-audio effect through a set of mathematical functions that simulate the delays and positional cues that your ears use to locate sound

Just for the sake of DOS games, we popped a Creative Labs AWE-64 Gold Into a free ISA slot. We're hoping that the AWE is the last ISA sound

card we have to deal with. Still, it's a good, clean-sounding card and has always been trouble-free.

The Heavy Metal has a stock AWE 64
Value Edition. The Value Edition is a nice buy at \$95. It's a little noisier than the Gold and doesn't have as much onboard RAM (512KB versus 4MB), but the price is right, it sounds fine, and it's compatible.

JURY-RIGGED Two ordinary rubber bands hold this Roland SCD-15 Sound Canvas daughtercard to this Monster Sound part

Supersaver Rig

et's say that even \$2,500 is too rich for your blood. Can you build a hot-rod gaming box for \$1,500? Sure you can incidentally, we realize there are various. Pentium systems advertised for \$1,000 or less. The difference between those systems and this one hinges on the quality of the components, the amount of RAM, and, perhaps, even the presence of a monitor. Mostly, it's a matter of different components. You get what you pay for, and it's always better to know what you're getting.



Start with a 233MHz Pentium with MMX technology. Pop it onto an Asus TX97-XE motherboard. Add 32MB of generic, 60ns EDO DRAM. Pick up an inexpensive case with a slide-out motherboard tray, and a 230-watt power supply. You now have the core of the system.

Good quality graphics hardware is hard to find in this price range, but the Diamond Stealth II is a real deal. It has the speedy Rendition V2100 chip and 4MB of 12ns SGRAM, all for \$120. The Optiquest Q51 is a

decent 15 inch monitor. For a hard drive, the Quantum Fireball ST3.2 can be found for around \$220. The same Go datar CD-ROM unit we used in the Heavy Metal machine works, too, at only \$80. Add an AWE-64 Value Edition and a set of Cambridge SoundWorks PC Works, and things begin to cook.

Of course, you need input devices; you can get a decent Keytronic key



board for \$25. Toss in the Logitech 4-button mouse and there's your data input. A standard 1.44MB floppy drive rounds things out.

Performance is pretty good. The Stealth II gets around 119 3D WinBench 97 WinMarks on a P55C/233. The disk is fairly fast. Overall, this is a solid system. We couldn't squeeze in a 3Dix card at this price, but all the other components are actually pretty good. This system would have seemed otherworldly two years ago. Now you can have it for \$1,500.







Speakers Good sound cards deserve great speakers. For the Melldown, we went with Eminent Technologies' L.FT-11. It has two flat panel linear field transducers and a beefy bass section. Eminent Technologies supplies an Optimus 15 watts-per channel receiver as an option, it's small, so it doesn't take up much space. These speakers stack up well against some very high-end, home-audio speakers. The only downside we've found to these babies (other than their \$700 price tag) is that they are quite directional; but this is usually not a problem when you're sitting in front of a computer.

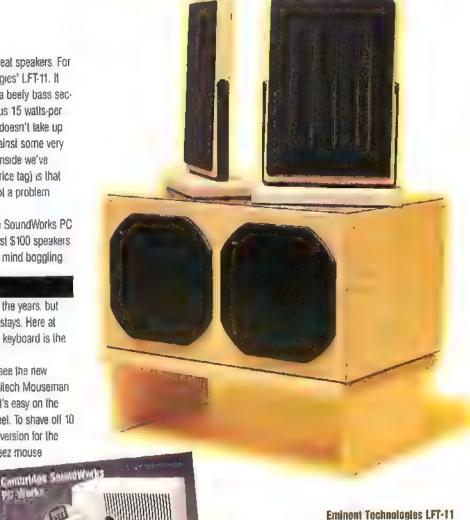
For the Heavy Metal system, the Cambridge SoundWorks PC Works is the obvious choice. These are the best \$100 speakers we've ever heard. The quality of their sound is mind boggling.

input Devices

We've tried various mouse alternatives over the years, but the mouse and the keyboard are still our mainstays. Here at CGW, we do a lot of writing, so our choice for keyboard is the Microsoft Natural Keyboard for both systems.

A mouse is a mouse is a mouse-until you see the new Logitech mice. For the Melidown, we use a Logitech Mouseman. Prus, which has a unique, contoured shape that's easy on the hand. It has four buttons (I) and a scroking wheel. To shave off 10 bucks, we went with the four-button (no wheel) version for the Heavy Metal rig. Rounding out all this is a Gel-eez mouse

pad from Case Logic, which has a comfortable, gel fil ed wrist rest.



Controllers

Controllers are perhaps the most personal of all game hardware. We tend to gravitate to different controllers, but for

the ultimate setup, we prefer the new Saltek X-36 stick/throttle combo paired with a set of CH Pro Pedals (you can deactivate the rudder gizmo on the X-36 throttie). For more casual garning, we often plug in a CH Jane's Combat Stick in "F-16 Combat Stick Mode" for fast game sessions.

After using Flight Simulator 98 for testing, we've dusted off our venerabre CH Pro Throllie. We haven't yet found a force-feedback device that interests us; they don't feel realistic. Actually, they all seem to be just Joysticks with motors. For less money, one interesting stick is Microsoft's new SideWinder Precision Pro. It's a relatively low-cost, all in-one controller, though it won't win any awards for looking or feeling realistic.

For driving, our favorite wheel is the ThrustMaster NASCAR Pro Wheel (called the Formula One Pro Wheet in Europe). We like the quick release clamps and instant disconnect for the cable. However, our sim driving is pretty light. If you're a hard core CART racer, check out the Thomas Super-Wheel (TSW), it looks somewhat industrial, but is built like an M1 tank. A force feedback wheel intrigues us much more than a force-feedback

Continued on page 120







MELTDOWN

Component

Motherboard
CPU
Memory
Graphics (Primary)
Cilaphics (Secondary)
Display
Hand drive
Hand drive
Hand-drive controller
Froppy
Removable
Case
Power Supply
Keyboard
Mouse
Sound Card (1)

Vendor Supermicro

Intel
Micron / Crucial Tech.
STB
Duantum3D
Sony
Seagate
Mylex
Teac
Syquest
JDR
PC Power & Cooling
Microsoft
Logitech
Creative Labs
Diamond Multimedia
Eminent Technology

Product

Supermicro P6DLS PII/300 64MB SDRAM STB Velocity 128 Obstatat 100SB Sony W900 Cheetah Raid Mytex Flashpoint OW Syjel 1.5 JDR Microdevices PCP&C Jurbo 300 MS Natural Logitech Mouseman Plus AWE 64 Gold Monster Sound **Eminent LFF-13** Plextor UltraPlex

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HEAVY METAL

Component

Sound Card (2)

Speakers

CD-ROM

Motherboard CPU Memory Graphics (Primary) Graphics (Secondary)

Vendor

Plexion

ASUS Intel Generic Asus Canopus

Product

TOTAL:

P2L97 PII/233 32MB SDRAM 3DexPlorer Pure3D

Price

\$225

\$11,004

\$210 \$430 \$160 \$200 \$179

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Mouse
Sound Card (1)
Sound Card (2)

Speakers

CD-ROM

Viewsonic
Seagale
N/A
Teac
N/A
N/A
N/A
Microsoft
Logilech
Creative Labs
N/A
Cambridge SoundWorks

Goldstar

Optiquest 071
Seagale 7200
Built-in
Teac
None
Generic
(250 included)
MS Natural
Logitech 4 button
AWE-64 Value Edition
None
PC Works
Gordstar Stot Drive
TOTAL:

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SUPERSAVER RIG

Component

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CPU

Memory

Graphics (Primary)

Graphics (Secondary)

Display

Hard drive

Hard-drive controller

Floppy

Removable

Case

Power Supply

Keyboard

Speakers

CD-ROM

Sound Card (1)

Sound Card (2)

Mouse

Vendor ASUS. Intel Generic Diamond Multimedia N/A Viewsonic Duantum N/A Teac N/A N/A N/A Keytronic Logitech Creative Labs Cambridge SoundWorks

Goldstar

Product TX97 XE Pentium 233 w/MMX 32 M8 EDO DRAM Steamh II None Optiquest Q51 Quantum Fireball ST3.2 Buillen Teac None Generic (250 included) Keylronic Logitech 4-button AWF-64 Value Edition None PC Works Goldstar Stot Drive TOTAL:

\$150 \$220 \$80 \$120 \$0 \$230 \$220 \$0 \$30 \$0 \$75 \$0 \$25 \$49 \$95 \$0 \$99 \$90 \$1,483

\$450

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Continued from page 116

joystick, but we didn't have the chance to try one out for this year's rig.

We're not big on gamepads, but the ThrustMaster Rage 3D (not to be confused with the ATI Rage graphics accelerator) feels very nice, indeed. You can connect up to four pads for mulliplayer action. It's a major improvement over Thrusty's old pad.

One other gadget we sometimes use is Saitek's PC Dash. The PC Dash is a nitty little programmable touchpad that can be configured however you wish.

Network Hardware

Single-player gaming still occupies three-quarters of our game time, but every now and then, friends drop in with their computer for a network game session. We still like the 3Com Ether ink XL 10/100, It's very easy to set up and we've never had any hardware conflicts with the XL. We have a NetGear FE-108, 8-port, 100Mbit hub. There's no problem with lag time in this setup.

Setting up a LAN is not necessarily a simple matter, although Windows 95 makes it much easier than DOS does, even for most DOS games. Playing networked WARCRAFT 2, a DOS lille, is much easler using Windows 95 While IPX-compatible protocol is still the most common way for connecting games over a LAN, some games behave better using TCP/IP. One unfortunate side effect of the way Windows 95 handles TCP/IP is how it handles TCP/IP addresses. If you don't specify a specific address (a com mon thing with many ISP connections), the system will periodically pause and search for a source of TCP/IP addresses on the LAN (called a DHCP server). The solution is to hard-code IP addresses for the LAN connection (not



nection!). There are actually blocks of IP addresses reserved for private, Internal-only networks. Here's the list 10.0.0.0-10.255.255.255, 172.16.0.0 172.31.255.255, and 192.168.0.0-192.168.255.255. Pick a set of numbers from these ranges for your own internal network.

Our engine of choice for connectivity is ISDN (living in California is a blessing for this reason, at least). Cable modems haven't filtered into our area yet, ISDN is a little pricey for the Heavy

Melal, but for the Melldown, the Diamond NetCommander (SDN serves nicely. If you have need of a more standard office setup, a good second choice is the 3Com impactiO external—but it's a little slower than the Diamond However, it does have two phone tacks and is always on. Sticking with Diamond, we went with the Supra 56e external 56K modem (K56Flex) or Global Village's TelePort X2 modem, which supports USR's X2 slandard. With a good ISP, lag limes are much reduced, yet not as low as with ISDN.

Fusion

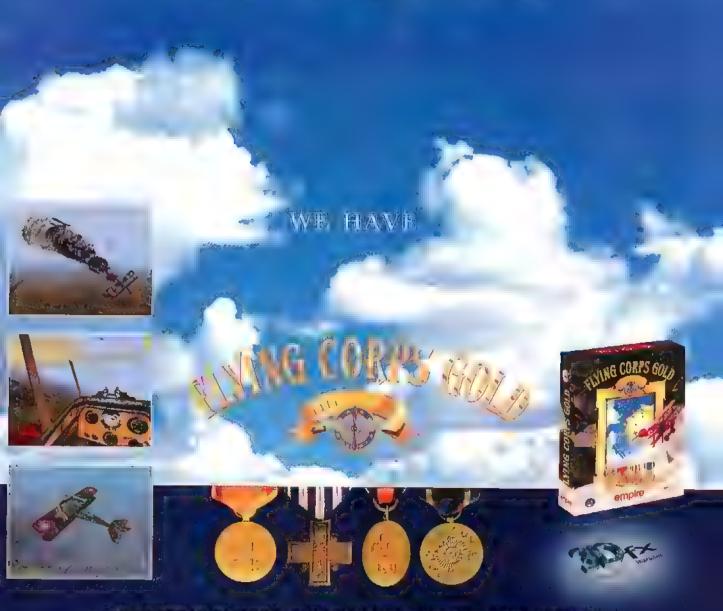
If you've glanced at the price list, you've seen that the Meltdown comes in at around \$11,000. However, our Heavy Metal rig is perhaps more noteworthy. It's no slouch in performance, and has a tot of solid components. We might spend a few bucks more on another 32MB of RAM but overall, it's a very decent system. It certainly would provide a good springboard for future upgrading, and it's a great system for those of us who aren't quite so obsessive about performance.

Looking back on our first ultimate rig article, it's mind-blowing that \$2,500 now buys you a 233MHz, 32 bit processor with MMX technology, a 7,200RPM hard-drive, speedy (and gor geous-tooking) 3D acceleration, and a 17-inch monitor. This was the high end, tooks. Technology marches on.

The Meildown is the ultimate dream machine. But it also requires a lot more pampering than does the Heavy Metal. There's a lot of bleeding edge stuff in it, and it requires a little extra TLC to keep it running smoothly. As is the case with a Dodge Viper, it's a bit uncivilized -but it is one fast puppy when speed is what you need. However, if this year's \$2,500 system is any indication, then what you see there will probably be the mainstream in two years.

We hope you find the information helpful, and we're sure you'll get the performance you expect. Until next month, may all your hardware live happily together. &

BLOW THE OPPOSITION OUT OF THE SKY.



THE BEST IN FLIGHT SIMULATION HAS JUST GOT EVEN BETTER

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HARDWARE

Comdex Sightings

f you want to see how big the computer industry is, spend a few hours at Comdex. This year about 250,000 people made the pilgrimage to Las Vegas for what is now the largest trade show in the world. With 10,000 products on dis-

play, It's impossible to see everything, so you have to pick your targets.

After surviving the thronging crowds, here's what I have to report

I saw several new 32x FIDE CID-ROM drives that looked promising, but I didn't see any UltraATA drives. Wandering through the Creative Labs booth, I noticed 3Dfx's software chief intently cycling users' reaction to Creative's Voodoo 2 demo. And speaking of Vixidoo 2, there were demos in a number of places, mostly nur-

ning TUROK and a couple of racing games. The QUAKE II demo was oddly absent. Creative Labs showed some other interesting stuff, including a DVD-RAM drive (though the standard is still up in the air) and a—gaspt—PCI sound card. It looks as if 1998 will be the end of the ISA sound card. (And

there will be much rejoicing.)

Other graphics sightings included latels new 2D/3D accelerator, the i740 (code-named

Auburn; see 3D IronWorks), a Pentium II laptop (no, it doesn't use Slot I; it's the next-generation chip), and several USB mice. Logitech showed a wireless keyboard/mouse combo that will be sold as a bundle. It uses Logitech's radio technology, so

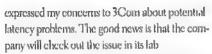
no line-of-sight is needed to an IR receiver

Several companies, including 3Com and Diamond, showed technol-

ogy using moderns that can be paired together to deliver an aggregate throughput of 112Kbps. Of course, this technology requires two phone lines, but unlike ISDN, much of the technology for supporting these dual-line connections is already in place (in ISPs that use Ascend routers). I also got a pack at 3 Com's new cable moderns. One

problem with cable modems is that most cable companies aren't equipped for two-way traffic. 3 Com's newly acquired U.S. Robotics division has solved that problem by using standard V.34 modems to han-

dle upstream traffic, potentially opening up much more of the country to cable modern technology. This might be great for Web browsing, but I



New mass-storage options abounded. Syquest had a couple of interesting items, the first one being their new IGB removable hard-drive. Dubbed the Sparq, it will retail for \$199 (with cartridges for only \$33). This looks like a killer piece of gear. Another interesting product is the company's not-yet-shipping 4.7GB removable drive. It will list closer to \$600, but a 4.7GB cartridge will cost less than \$200. Sengate showed its new Cheetah II. As with the earlier Cheetah (which



we selected for our Ultimate Came Machine), it spins at 10,000RPM, but the access time is down to 5.2 milliseconds, and it runs much cooler than the original part.

On the processor front, we caught a glimpse of the capabilities of the AMD K63D chip. The K6 adds additional instructions that don't exist in Intel processors to help speed up mathematical operations used in 3D graphics. Cleverly, AMD has developed a HAL for Direct3D, so programmers can use the additional instructions at a standard way. For example, we saw 3D WinBeach run faster on a prototype K6 3D/300 than on an identically configured Pentium II/300, What's more, we saw a demo of Dreamworks' upcoming TRESPASSER: JURASSIC PARK that looked better on the K63D than on the Pentium II. The frame rate was the same on both CPUs, but the Pentium II. ran at 320x200 while the K6 ran at 512x384. Oh. and the K6 version had translucent water and filtered textures. - Loyd Case



HARDWARE PIPELINE

Deschutes (400MHz Pentium II)

440BX chipset (supports 100MHz system clock, 4 CPUs)

3Dfx Voodoo 2

01 '98

S3 VIRGE GX3

02 '98



New High-End Intel Accelerator

or more than a year, intel has been working on a project to bring Lockheed Martin's high-end 3D technology to the PC market Until now, there's been very little information about the Intel project, code-named Auburn, At

the Comdex computer show, I managed to play with a prototype of the 2D/3D board, called the i740, and I have some numbers to report. Bear in mind that both hardware and software were beta, so these numbers will most likely change. But even for a beta, this part looks promising.

I ran 3D WinBench 98 to take a close look at the feature-sel supported by the i740. One immediately noticeable result was Image quality, which was quite good—especially MIP-mapping. The i740 did not support the higher-end MIP-mapping features (for example, linear/mipmap/linear in 3D WinBench 98 parlance) but the more common MIP-mapping modes showed none of the odd streaking or artifacting visible in RIVA 128 cards. The chip also supports antialiasing, though this feature didn't seem to be turned on in a way that 3D WinBench was able to recognize.

The i740 delivered impressive performance. The card was AGP-based with 4MB of video memory, running on a 266MHz Pentium II. This beta version of the i740 came in with a score of 460, placing it between the 3Dfx-equipped Monster3D—which gets around 370—and the RiVA 128 cards, which come in around 490. Given the overall image quality—quite good—this isn't a bad score at all.

The real issue is what impact the i740 will have on the overall graphics chip market. If Intel can deliver a chip at a relatively low cost with reasonable 2D and 3D performance, some of the more marginal players may be muscled out of the way.

I wasn't able to check out 2D performance or real games. But I'm caukously impressed, particularly if the price point is right, —Loyd Case

ACRONYM O' THE MONTH

RSLANT: Digital Subseriber Line James Healthing
A place of notworking hardware used for increasing throughout
DSL connections

LOYD CASE . UNDER THE HOOD

Driver Ed

Or, What a Difference a Driver Makes

raphies cards used to be easy. After running through more than 30 graphics cards in the last few months, I dug into my archives to reread the video card review in the September 1994 Computer Caming World, Back then, the only real game we used for testing was PLIGHT SIMULATOR 5 0a. One of our test mainslays was a DOS benchmark called 3Dbench. DirectX

wasn't even a twinkle in Microsoft's eve at the

Almost every game shipping ran under DOS

We tested on two systems, a "mainstream"

time, and Windows 95 was still called "Chicago."

486/66 VESA local-bus system and a "high-end" Pentium 90

My, how times have changed.

THE ART OF PERFORMANCE

In 1994, performance in gaming was defined by how many pixels you could push through the video card. There was only one game (FLICH) SIM TOOLKE) that used the 2D acceleration features of certain graphics eards, and no mainstream title used 3D acceleration—though Matrox had a couple of technology demos on their high-end CAD-onented cards. We ran WinBeneth 2D WinMarks almost as an



afterthought

Today, it's much more complicated. You not only have to worry about Windows 2D performance (since many of us. willingly or unwillingly, live and work in the Windows environment), but now you also have to deal with DirectDraw, Direct3D, and OpenGL.

The graphics cards themselves, though much simpler in appearance, are more complex than ever. Feature sets for 3D accelerators vary so

MContinued on pg 124

McContinued from pg 123

much, you wonder how any game can possibly run successfully on all of them:—and few actually do.

Driver writers are the unsung heroes (and villains, for that matter) in today's complex driver environment. A good driver writer can wring out that last ounce of performance and turn a mediocre graphics card into a good one — or a good one into a great one. In the past few months, I've tested more than 30 graphics cards. Time after time, I've been surprised by a new driver's increase an performance or newly added feature.

One good example of this is the RIVA 125 chip. The PCI version of the STB Velocity IZ8 fell just a little short of the Diamond Viper in our October review. By the time we tested the AGP versions for last month's reviews, STB had been aggressively incorporating new updates from NVIDIA, Early Velocity 128 drivers didn't have fog-table support enabled, but the most recent drivers included It. All of a sudden. I could run SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE with the STB card and have full fogeffects. Diamond has succ

card's performance
Another interesting case in point is the
ATI Rage Pro. The Xpert@play and Allin-Wonder Pro use this chip for 3D
acceleration. Our early testing indicated
that the Rage Pro was far better than its

appgraded its drivers as well, but it's Inter-

esting to note how drivers can affect a

predecessor, the Rage II+. Nonetheless, it fell far short of the performance of the RIVA 128 cards or 3Dfx boards. Over the next several months, each subsequent beta driver from ATI improved performance by 25 percent (at least in 3D WinBench)

IMAGE QUALITY

Which brings us to the issue of image quality and 3D graphies. FLICHT SIMULTION 98's default VCR replay is an interesting test, as it demonstrates some of the sim's new features. Pay close attention to the Paris scenery near the end of the

the next fix). If you run the same VCR replay on the Canopus Pure3D, you don't see any flickering — but the textures look a little too filtered, which is one of the hall-marks of 3DIx boards.

The RIVA 128 boards don't escape our scrutiny, either Occasional texture cracking (when you can see between polygon seams) was one of the problems with the drivers we reviewed in our graphics card showdown

Image quality also tends to be a relative thing. Unlike 2D scenes, there are myriad subtle ways to render a 3D scene.
Once you get a 3D card and live with it

for a while, another cards rendering of the same game will look different to you. Since humans tend to favor the familiar, different often translates to "bad," In some eases, the differences are a matter of lower quality (just look at the rendening quality of one of the original Laguna 3D boards, such as the Craphics Blaster 3D), In other cases, the differences are simply a matter of taste (witness the bashing that goes on between opposing devotees of 3Dfx and Rendition chips, for example).



FUZZY LOGIC FLIGHT SIMULATOR 98 is a useful fool for checking 3D feature support. Here's an example of a MIPmap that's only partially loaded. Note the sharp transition to a fuzzy texture halfway up the outside view

replay. On some cards, the textures annoyingly flash in and out. PLICHT SIMULATOR 98 seems to be a bit finishing textures are different level-of-detail terrain textures being swapped in and out too quickly). The Rage Pro has this problem (although the driver wizards at ATT are busy working on

PLATFORM BLUES

Standard APIs are wonderful things in theory. Once you have one or two standard APIs, everyone can write to them and stop worrying about designing their own 3D-rendering engines. But standard APIs can become a "least common denominator" that will exclude

CTECH

> WHO'S ON FIRST?

If you have more than one 3D accelerator in your system, it's not always obvious which card is being used by a particular Direct3D game. We found a cool utility called 3DCC (3D Control Center) on Videologic's Web site.

It allows you to switch between the primary, secondary, and PowerVR card. You can get it at www.videologic.com/visoft/ a3d.htm.

TURN BACK THE CLOCK

I'm not an advocate of overclocking your Voodoo Graphics card, but if you are going to do it, you should practice "safe" overclocking. One way is to add a fan to your 3Dfx card. We came across a handy fan designed for just that purpose, the 3DfxCool. It's a simple device that can help your 3Dfx texture processor stay cool when you jack it up to 60MHz. But don't tell 3Dfx 1 wrote this!

You can check out the 3DfxCool at www.3dfxcool.com. Make sure you tell them which 3Dfx board you have.

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technologies that don't quite behave the way the API expects. The PowerVR chip from NEC and Videologic is a good example. If you've seen GL QUAKE on a PowerVR accel crator, you know it looks pretty good. You can quibble about differences in image quality between the 3Dfx PowerVR versions, but GL QUAKE on the PowerVR chip nonetheless looks very mee. But Direct3D and the PowerVR don't always get along very well. Performance can vary radically from one D3D title to the next. These quirky interactions also have an adverse impact on how 3D WinBench "sees" the card, With OpenGL, there's a method for adding extensions in a standard way. (That's nght, you can add nonstandard features in a standard way; think about that for a moment, it's a powerful idea.) Direct3D doesn't really have this now, though DirectX 6.0 will have

a mechanism for talking directly to the hardware

CHEATING

There's not much difference in real-world performance between a eard that gets a 2D WinBench 97 score of 85 and one that gets 100, But the difference sells cards, and card manufacturers look for anything that gives them an edge in marketing, One method is called GDI bypass, GDI (Graphics Display Interface) is the standard way Windows renders regular, 2D, Windows-related, nongame graphes. GDI is what the programmers use when they want to have a window opened, a mempulled down, or a hitmap painted. Several years ago, graphics card makers discovered they could substitute their own methods for doing these functions and bypass GDI The result was a dibbious increase in real-world

performance, but boy, did those benehmark scores suddenly jump.

The problem with GDI bypass is the potential for compatibility problems. In stepped Microsoft, using its muscle in a positive way. Now, graphics drivers go through a certification process managed by Microsoft's WHQL (Windows Hardware Quality Lab). If a draver turns on GDI bypass by default, it can't get a WHQL certification. So check to see if your graphies hardware has a WHOLcertified driver. This doesn't mean that a driver won't have bugs - it just means that it's written to conform to Microsoft guidelines

CHECK YOUR DRIVERS

Graphies drivers are critical. Cheek your driver revinumbers, and make sure that you get the fatest updates, it can make a big difference in performance and image quality &



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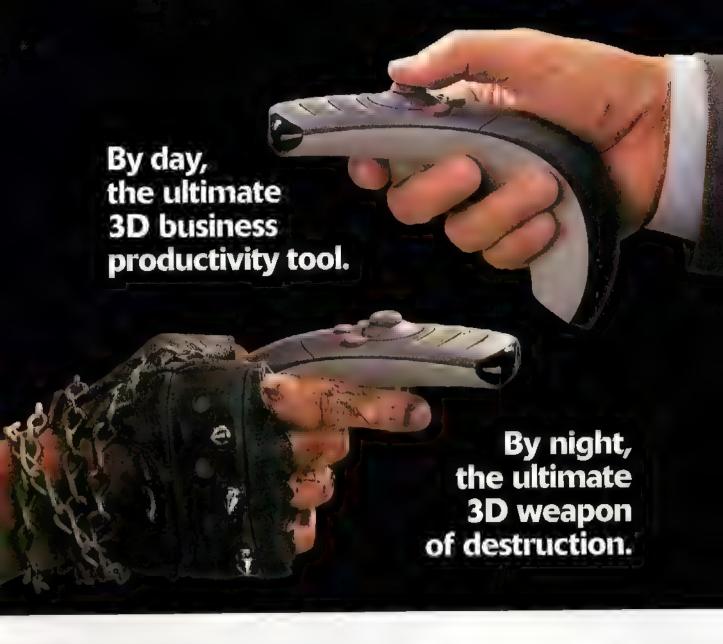
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Unexpected Performance.
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Plextor Delivers

by Loyd Case

hen we reviewed Plextor's 12/20 SCSI CD-ROM drive (CCW#158, September 1997), we said it was the last CD-ROM drive you would ever need. That assessment is probably still accurate. However, if you have a slower CD-ROM drive, (which means anything except a 12/20), consider Plextor's newest offering, the UltraPlex.

The UltraPlex is a CAV (constant angular velocity) CD-ROM unit that is rated from 14x on the inner tracks to a full 32x on the outer tracks. This is an Ultra-SCSI device, so it apily handles the fire hose-sized flood of data this drive can pour into your system. If you have a SCSI host adapter capable of Ultra-SCSI speeds, the UltraPlex can handle burst data transfer rates of up to 20MB/sec. Using WinBench 98s CD-ROM test, the UltraPlex canked out a

stellar 1670 CD WinMarks, with only 3.8 percent CPU utilization. (The host adapter was an Adaptec 2940UW). WinBench 98 also measured an average access time of 95 milliseconds.

This drive supports just about any CD-ROM format you can imagine, including the new CD-RW discs. It also has a neat feature for audio buffs—the capability of extracting CD Audio (red-book) data across the SCSI bus at full speed. This is far in excess of the old SPD/IF connector's lx speed. The UltraPlex comes in both caddy and tray models; caddies were reintroduced with the UltraPlex due to enstoner demand (the caddy pinteets CDs that are being passed around offices).

The UltraPlex can be purchased as an external or internal drive; optional SCSI host adapters are also avoilable, but they'll cost you more. A floppy disk



with some handy control utilities (meluding audio extraction) comes with the drive.

If you want a CD-ROM drive that's incredibly fast, well-mannered, and easy on your CPU, take a good look at the UltraPlex. §

PAPPEAL: Anyone who wants the ultimate CD-ROM drive.

PPROS: A CB-ROM drive that behaves almost like a hard drive; cool digital audio extraction; supports all CD formats.

A little

A little pricey; needs SCSI host adapter.



Price: \$250 (nterna version, no SCSI adap er) Vendor: Plextor (408) 980-1838 www.plextor.com

ATI ALL-IN-WONDER PRO . REVIEW ***

A Media Geek's Delight

by Loyd Case

ve never been very interested in convergence — that warm, fuzzy term that suggests a mating between interactive and passive media technologies. That was until I popped the All-in-Wonder Pro (AIWP) AGP card into my system and became hooked.

I admit it: Beyond Babylon 5, I watch almost no television. With the AIWP, though, I find myself running TV in the background, if only to be able to check out CNN occasionally. The TV timer is pretty amazing, too. It can search for specific channels, put up little thumbnails of numerous channels on your screen, and perform keyword searches on closed-captioning text.

The video capture features look interesting as well, although AIWP uses software-only compression. Another upside. The All-in-Wonder Pro's NTSC output is very clean, and produces solid image-quality when running through a Idevision.

Ultimately, though, I'm a game player, so I needed to be convinced of the Allin-Wonder's 3D and 2D graphics capabilities. I ran the ATI eard in an AGPequipped, 266MHz Pentium II (alongside a Diamond Monster 3D), Using 3D WinBench 98's extensive new quality tests, I was able to really wring out the Direct3D performance of the All-in-Wonder Pro. The Pro supports an impressive set of features; about the only things lacking are antialiasing and perpixel MIP-mapping. The 3D WinBench 98 aggregate frame-rate came in at 346. (This number was for an 8MB card: a 4MB card might not get a score quite this high.) This compares quite favorably to the Monster 3D's 349 Still, there are a few image-quality problems in Direct3D games, such as the severe texture flashing in Microsoft FLIGHT SIMULATOR 98 MOTO RACER and WIPEOUT XL looked pretty good, though, DOS and Windows 2D numbers were good, if not at the top of the heap.

Overall, the All-in-Wonder Pro is a terrific card if you want to have TV tuner and video capabilities tightly integrated with your system. It's no slouch as a 3D accelerator, either, although we're eagerly awaiting ATIs new driver releases, which promise even better performance and fixes for some of the image-quality issues.



DAPPEAL: Anyone who wants a solid 20/30 accelerator coupled with a TV tuner.

▶ PROS: Great TV management; solid 20- and 30-performance.

Those caveats aside, this

card is worth a look. %

PCONS:

Expensive; needs a cable TV connection for full effect.



Price: \$379 (4MB), \$449 (8MB) Vendor: ATI Technologies (905) 882-2600 www.atitech.ca





Little Big Screen

Creative Labs Breaks the \$400 Barrier

by Dave Salvator

VD represents a major paradigm shift in storage, content distribution, and media presentation. Or something. The marketing of DVD has been a study in hyperbole. But like it or not, DVD is here to stay, and will

eventually supplant conventional CD-ROM drives in PCs. So what does this menn for gamers? Two words lagger bit-bucket. Yes, you'll also get MPEG-2 video playback and Dolly Digital (AC-3) 6-channel andro for movies, but very few games make effective use of fullmotion video in actual gameplay. So DVD's main contribution for gamers will be gobs of storage space - from 7 to more than 25 times that of a traditional CD-ROM This bigger bit-bucket translates Into more detailed graphics, higher-quality

sounds, and better-looking trailers.

One major roadblock to DVD has been the price of the kits, which usually range from \$600 to \$800. But Creative Labs brings in its new PC-DVD Encore DXR2 for under \$400 'The kit includes an EIDE 2x DVD-ROM drive and an MPEG-2 decoder board. The bundleware includes DVD versions of WING COMMANDER IV and that oldie but goodie, DRAGON'S LAIR. Other notables: S-video output from the MPEG-2 decoder board, and SP/DIF digital audio output to route to a Dolby AC-3-enabled amplifier.

Installation proves fairly painless, though by its nature, it's a somewhat involved process. You'll need an available 5-1/4-inch drive bay and a free PCI-slot. The DVD-ROM drive comes preconfigured as an IDE slave device and can be placed on either your primary or secondary EIDE controller. Just to make the decoder board installation a little more interesting, Linstalled it into a sys-

tem that already had a 3Dfx-based 3Donly board to see if that would give PC-DVD Encore any trouble. It didn't. Once both devices were physically in place, I fired up the system. The DVD-ROM drive was detected on POST, and when Windows 95 came up, I fed it a driver disk for the detected DVD



decoder board, and the units drivers were installed. Next, I installed Creative's PC-DVD Player for playing DVD titles, and the unit was good to go. Though not enabled by default, the DVD-ROM drive supports EIDE bus-mastering, which lowers CPU usage during transfers. Another note: This second-generation DVD-ROM drive can read CD-R media, something first-generation drives couldn't do.

Although DVD-ROM will play an increasingly important role in PCs, its performance as a CD-ROM drive, though improved, still falls short of traditional drives. Creative rates the PC-DVDs drive as a 20x CD-ROM drive But in WinBench 98's CD-ROM WinMark test, Creative's DVD-ROM turned in a score of 961, compared to a 1,320 by the test system's installed 24x Toshiba drive - making the DVD drive only about three-quarters as fast as the CD ROM drive. Other performance news is mixed. While the DVD-ROM's CPU usage came in at 3.6 percent, compared to the CD-ROM's 5.3 percent, its access time was 148 nulliseconds, versus

the CD-ROMs III. So if you're hell-bent on having a DVD-ROM unit in your ng, you'd do well to hold on to your existing CD-ROM drive, and run both.

Lalso ran a wide variety of DVD movie content on the PC-DVD Encore, and the results were, by and large, impressive. At 800x600x16-bit

cofor, image quality was smooth—both in a window and full-screen—thanks to Encore's bilinear interpolation filtering. This type of filtering smoothes pixelation when the playback image is sealed up, but will sometimes cause a blurry effect if not done well. Blurring was minimal, even on credits. When 1 upped the resolution to 1024x768 and 1280x1024, Image quality headed south somewhat, with some visible deinterlacing that produced

paggies on vertical lines. The Encore's bundled DVD player features a remote-control—like interface, and is readily navigated for playing DVD content. The player can also play MPEG-1 and VideoCD content.

Creative's second-generation DVD kit gets a lot right, including the price. But DVD-RAM drives—which let you write data as well as read it—should ship by the end of 1998. And while DVD-based games will begin to ship in 1998, there's no pressing need yet to have DVD in a garning box. But if you just have to have DVD, this part warrants a look. §

DVD in their rig.

PROS: Easy hardware installation; aggressively priced.

cons: DVB's throughput performance still can't match a typical CD-ROM drive; some installation headaches;

a few configuration problems with DVD player.

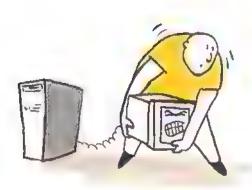


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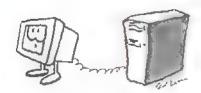


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Livin' Large

by Dave Salvator

hen it comes to displays, bigger is usually better. Of course, with CRT monitors, a bigger picture usually equates to a smaller desk, especially when you move into the behemoth 24-inch and 24-inch range, KDS' new VS-19 monitor—which is actually a 20-inch monitor—does take up a fair amount of desk real estate, but the bigger picture may be worth the saenfice

The VS-19 has furily well detailed onscreen display (OSD) controls that let you tweak contrast, brightness, geometry (vertical/horizontal, sizing/position), and color temperature settings. Getting into the controls is pretty easy, though I didn't find a way to back completely out, and instead waited for the control panel to time-out and disappear. Setup is straightforward, since the VS-19 is a Phig-and-Play monitor, though the lack of a monitor-specific INF file (which lists the monitor's top-end refresh rates) is annoying, because it makes tweaking refresh rates more difficult. The good news here is that the VS-19 supports up to 75Hz vertical refresh at 1600x1200.

Once setup is complete, the rest of the news is, for the most part, good. When I put the VS-19 through its paces with EAs NBA LIVE 98, its image quality was bright, and colors looked rich and full And as someone who normally works on a 17-inch monitor, the difference in screen size is appreciable

One noteeable currosity the VS-19's front glass has a much more pronounced convex curve to at than most monitors, resulting in some image "warping" in the screen's four corners. And while the effect was pretty evident when I ran test patterns, it didn't detract much from image quality during gameplay.

All told, the VS-19 is a good mosttor offenng larger size and good image



quality for under \$1,000. The lack of a specific INF file is an annoyance, and for gamers who also do a lot of full-screen image editing, the VS-19's curved front glass might curve the corners of images somewhat. Still, in gameplay, this distortion isn't really palpable, and if you're looking for a bigger screen size and don't mind giving up some desk space in the bargain, take a look at the VS-19 %

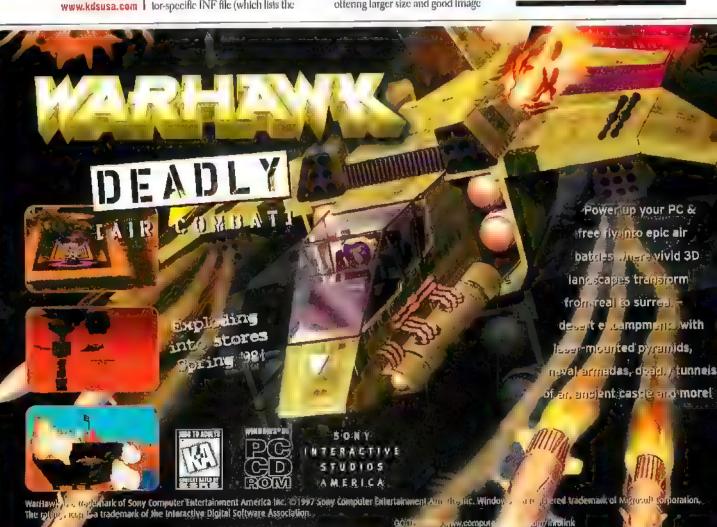
>APPEAL: 15-Inch monitor owners looking for a bigger picture.

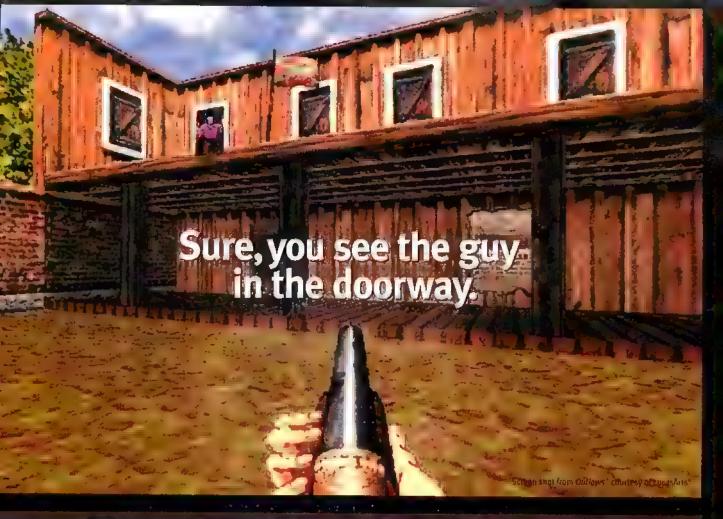
PROS: Big, bright picture; good OSD controls.

CONS: Curved glass slightly dis-

torts corners of display image; no INF IIIu included.

E LABS RATED ****





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Button Overkill

by Loyd Case

f the ThrustMaster NASCAR Pro Racing Wheel represents an attempt at capturing realism in a driving controller, then SC&T's Per4mer Racing Wheel is pure fantasy. It's certainly not a believable steering wheel.

The first thing you notice are the garish decals that are meant to look like a dashboard. Speed Racer's dashboard may look like this, but I much prefer the spare appearance of the ThrustMaster wheel — after all, in most racing games I've driven, the dashboard shows up on the screen.

The next thing you notice are the buttons. There are a lot of them, 15 in all To its credit, SC&T ships a pair of Directinput drivers that work with the wheel in either 4-button mode (supporting most games) or 15-button mode (for games that allow controls to be reconfigured). Too bad the 15-button mode doesn't work well, I could never get the

hat/pad gizino to work properly, despite repeated calibration attempts.

After getting past the wheel, I moved on to the pedals, which need to be plugged into a special connection on the wheel. I actually liked the pedals quite a bit For one thing, they're large, with a big platform that allows easy foot placement (there is even a beef rest) and prevents the pedals from sliding around on a carpeted surface. Other makers of driving controls could learn from SC&Ts pedals.

Once I got past the installation hurdles, gameplay commenced. I ran through parts of NEED FOR SPEED II and I-76 with the Pertiner. This wheel doesn't feel as light as the CHI wheel, but it's not as stiff as the Thrusty, either. It aniocenters nicely, but the placement of the buttons generates a lot of confusion when you're actually playing. There are no programming tools; you must count on the game having reconfigurable con-



trols. The base is big, so you need a lot of desk space. Also, the suction cups tend to pop out of the base during gameplay. Maybe a little superglue is in order?

The SC&T Per4mer isn't a bad wheel, but it's certainly not a standout. If you can live with the poor button placement and driver headaches, then this could be a lower-cost alternative to the NASCAR Pro Wheel—if realism isn't your bag. §

DAPPEAL: Someone looking for a low-cost wheel with a lot of buttons.

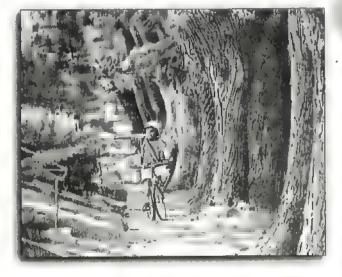
PROS: Nice foot-pedal design; light, yet precise, autocentering.

PCOMS: Buttons here, buttons

there, buttons everywhere; Directinput driver is buggy.

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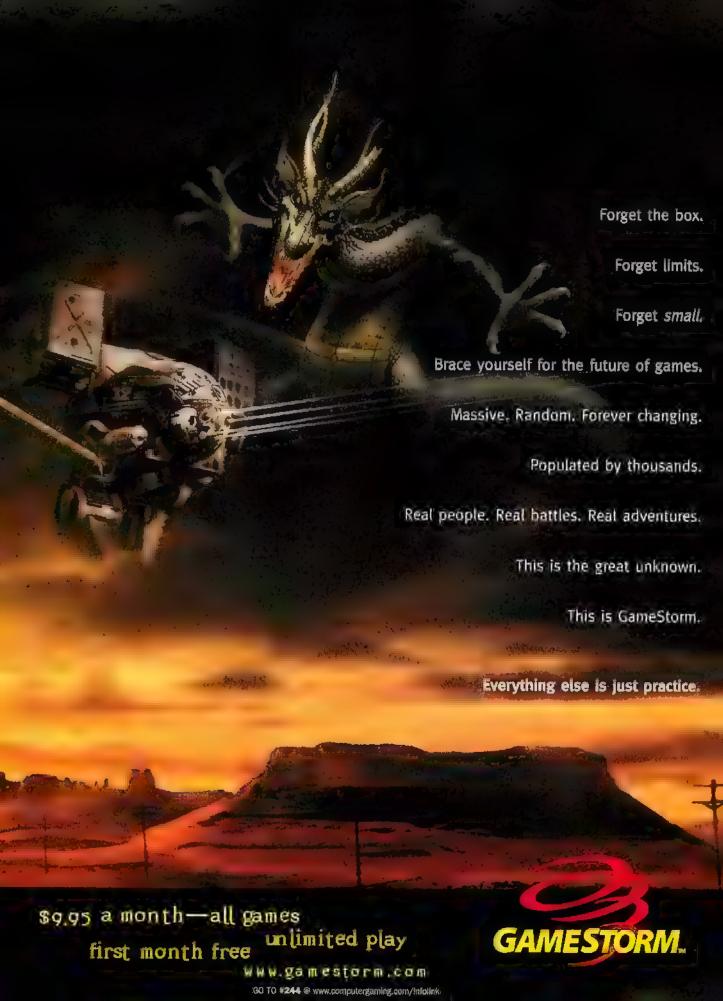
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Morgana listant the dragon is close

Sir. Trans: what spells do you have left?

Margana NONE - i used my last on the stairs

Sir. Trent; then all we have is a sword . . .
i'll go alone

Morgana: no! Str.Trent!!

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Outstanding:

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together to form a Transcendent Gaming Experience, Our strongest buying recommendation.



Very Good:

A high-quality game that succeeds in many areas. It may have minor prob-

lems, but is still worth your money, especially if you're interested in the subject matter or genre.



Average:

A mixed bag, it can be a game that reaches for the stars, but falls short in sev-

eral ways. It can also be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.



Work:

A game with serious problems. Usually buggy, seriously lacking in play value, or porly conceived

just a poorly conceived game design—you should think long and hard before buying it.

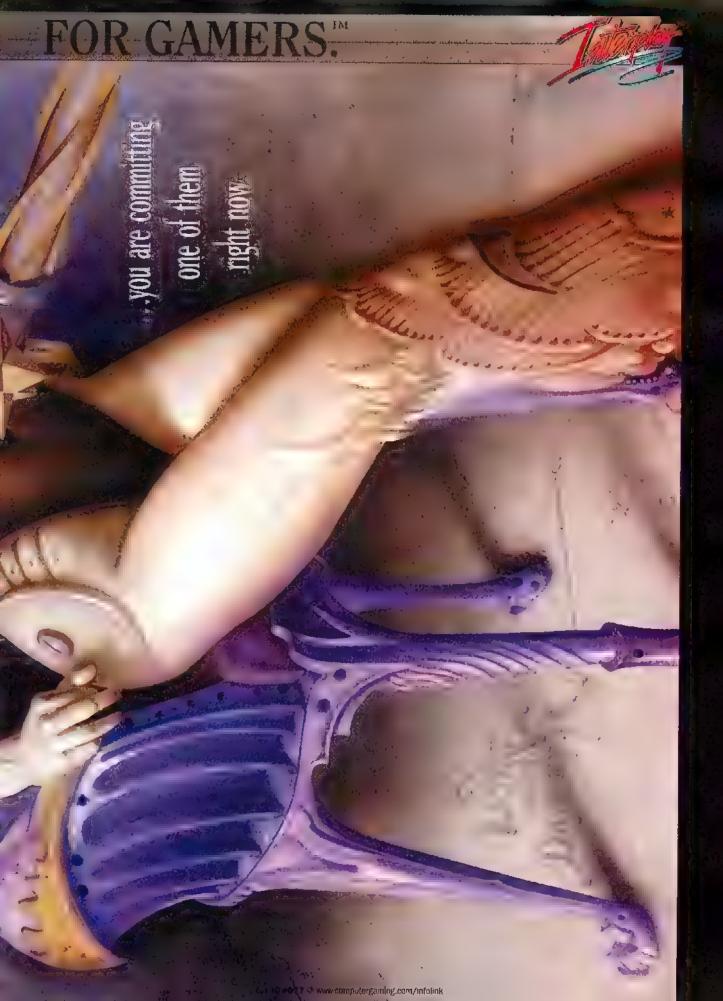


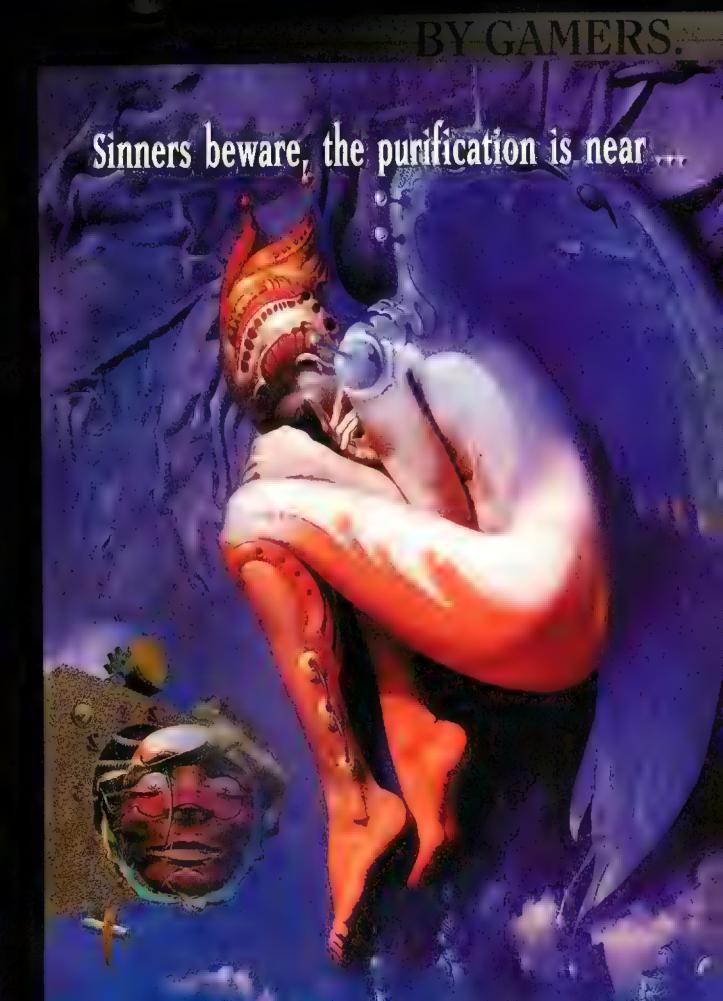
Abysmal:

The rare game that gets it all wrong. This is reserved for those products so

buggy, ill-conceived, or valueless that you won der why they were ever released in the first place.









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The Odd Squad

A Charming New Cast of Characters Arrives on the PC

by Ken Brown

ts easy to fall in love with ABE'S ODDYSEE, but don't go running off to get marned without a second look. Yes, it's beautiful, funny, and full of personality, but be prepared to have to prove your worth over and over again before getting any special privileges. Like the ability to save, for instance More on that later.

If you haven't seen it, ABE'S ODDYSEE is a side-scrolling platform game with

several annovative twists. Tired of stereotypical heroes? You play a skinny little wretch named Abe a Mudokon slave at the Rupture Farms meat processing plant. To add insult to injury, Abe's mouth is sewn shut. In the introductory animation, he makes a horrifying discovery Rupture Farms will soon be tuming Mudokons into

packaged food treats. As you might expect, Abe's work ethic tapers off pretty dramatically at that point

The intro segues perfectly to the start of the game. Throughout, the designers have succeeded in integrating the cut-scenes almost seamlessly with the game-play sequences, which goes a long way toward preserving the consistency of the game world

As the game begins, Abe is on the lam, trying to escape from Rupture Farms while rescuing as many of his fellow Mitdokons as possible. You control Abe with the usual complement of platform moves such as running, jumping, erouching, and rolling. My favorite move

is sneaking, which lets Abe creep by guards without being noticed—a great factic and a real treat to watch.

GAMESPEAK

Abe can also talk, which is a preity exciting innovation in this kind of game. He's not a chatterbox, but his vocabulary is just large enough to give him a kind of personality. The designers call this feature GameSpeak, and they provide an interface to help you practice his abili-

Slig, Sligs are funny-looking robotic guards with bad tempers and nasty machine guns. When Abe possesses one, the Slig cries out "Ow!" runs around feebly, and then falls under Abe's command. At that point you can control the Slig for us long as you like, experimenting with his amusing wocabulary and using him to ventilate all his friends.

As with Abe, the Slig's speech ability isn't just for fun. Sometimes you'll need the Slig to yell "Watch out!" to nearby

Mudokons, or they'll die in the ensuing firefight. At other times, you'll have to repeat a supervisor's speceli into a console before the supervisor will deactivate an electric field. But the most fun I had was while making a Shg search for his Slog (guard dog). You force the Slig to walk around yelling. "Here, boy, here, boy!" and when the Slog finally appears, you pump him with lead and make the



SLIG BOMBING After picking up some grenades from the "Boom" machine, Abe lobs one onto an unsuspecting Slig below.

ties. Abe can say "Hello," "Follow me," and "Wait." He can also hiss, whistle, fart, and laugh. Not bad for a guy who's mouth is stitched tight

His speech is not only amusing, it's necessary for advancing in the game. Early on, you'll need to get other slaves' attention by saying "Hello" and "Follow me." Later, some of the puzzles require Abe to whistle and fart on one. (Parental advisory: This function is capable of keeping a youngster amused for hours, if you can stand the sound of incessant flatulence.)

Abe has one other speech command: chanting. It can vary, but the main purpose of chanting is to possess an evil Slig laugh. Then you walk the Slig over a cliff and make Abe laugh. Now that's entertamment.

HOW ODD

Oddworld—the game environment—is an exquisitely detailed and organically consistent virtual world. The world has been painstakingly designed and rendered, and although you navigate Abe along a 2D plane, the environment's depth isn't totally lost, as in most platform games. At various points a cinematic cut-scene changes the field of view, bringing distant features into focus as the new plane of action. At other times the action can occur on more than



Price: \$44 99
Minimum System
Requirements: Pentium
120 (Pentium 166
recommended) 16MB
RAM, SVGA-graphics, 4x
CD-ROM drive, Windows
95 compatible sound
card (Sound Blastercompatible for DOS)
Multiplayer Support:
None
Designer: Oddworld

Inhabitants
Publisher: GT Interactive
New York, NY
(800) 610 4847
www.nddworld.com

www.gtinteractive.com



MINE JUMPING Nearly every screen has a set designer's flair for the dramatic. Here, Abe and Elum size up a gauntiet of rotating mines.

one plane along the z-axis. Oddworld Inhabitants (the developers) obviously spent a lot of time rendering a realistic-looking world. The company intends to reuse it in the ODDWORLD "Quintology," the five-game series of which ODDYSEE is the first part.

There are seven distinct environments here, each offering different challenges. You'll have to overcome a variety of objects, such as bombs, motion sensors, meat saws, and falling debris, all the while fending off attacks from bizarre creatures. You'll die frequently, but the game restores Abe automatically to a recent screen.

The puzzles are easy at first but become fiendishly elever and more complicated. (See our tips for winning in this month's Gamer's Edge.) The only actual weapon Abe will ever have, apart from a gun-toting Slig, is a hand grenade. Most of the time all Abe has to work with is a rock or a piece of meat, and you have to figure out how to use them to defeat your enemics. The puzzles are not only challenging, they're also thoroughly consistent with the game world.

Fortunately, Abe isn't entirely alone in his mission. He has the occasional support of allies throughout the game to confer special knowledge or power to him. There are Mudokons, a powerful shaman known as Bigface, and a special creature called Elum. Elum ("mule" spelled backward) is an endearing beast who responds to Abe's voice commands and allows Abe to nde him, which comes in handy for making big jumps. The only liability Elium poses is that he's prone to distraction when cating honey. This becomes a puzzle in itself as you try to separate him from his favorite food. Fortunately, where there's honey, there are also bees.

AT ODDS

I've covered only a few of the game's many terrific qualities. As you can tell, I was charmed and delighted by its personality and wonderful sense of humor. I'd love to recommend ABE'S ODDYSEE to anyone—but I can't. You see, the game has a terrific secret.

Oddword and was designed by people who love console games. And most console games are designed to make you play all the way through a level before saving. You have to finish the entire level, then you get a code, then you advance. Only trouble is, computer gamers have different expectations and tolerance levels. Rather than foreing ourselves through a QUAKE or JEDI KNIGHT level all at once, we like to save the game after particularly difficult parts to minimize reputition. In ODDYSEE, you can save at any time, but the actual save points are at predetermined locations in the game. This means that you might save near the end of a difficult level, but if the game's nearest predetermined save location is at the beginning of that level, you'll have to play through the whole thing again anyway. Since the interval between these points is usually several screens long, the game requires that you perfectly execute up to 10 puzzle-filled screens before being able to advance to the next save point. Failure means repeating the process, ad nauseum, until you get it right. To make matters worse, some of these puzzles won't just be physical moves, they albe speech puzzles. So you'll have to hear and repeat back a senes of whistles and farts dozens of times until you're able to progress





POSSESSION Here's what it looks like when Abe possesses a Slig. You can then make the Slig walk around and drill all his little budgles

beyond a certain sequence. I had to repeat the most difficult sequences more than 100 times, and though I may be slower than you, I wouldn't recommend buying ABE'S ODDYSEE unless you can tolerate repetition and have plenty of time on your hands.

If it wasn't for this major flaw, I would recommend ABE'S ODDYSEL to any action or adventure gamer. It's loaded with humor, personality, and chann, and the story and puzzles are enough for experienced gamers to sink their teeth into. If the designers provide a more versatile save feature for the next four editions in the series, I see a bright future for Abe and his Oddworld friends. §

PAPPEAL: Anyone who prefers puzzie-solving to fast, violent action.

▶ PROS: Beautiful graphics and design; interesting characters; wonderful sense of humor; GameSpeak.

PCONS: Extremely repetitive play; save-game feature is restricted to certain areas; cannot load from the Escape screen.





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Bloody Mess

Take Away the Controversy and You Have a Mediocre Game

by Scott A. May



here there's smoke, there's usually fire. Prerelease hype for Ripcord's debut game, POSTAL, blew plenty of smoke at both consumers and the press, hoping to fuel a firestoria.

of controversy. So far, it's worked. Once you get past the hype, though, the game reveals itself to be lukewarm at best

The game's backstory is purposely left
to the player's own
twisted imagination
You assume the role
of a disgrantled citizen known as Postal
Dude, who pops a
cork after being evicted from his house.
Your heavily armed
character then lets out
his frustrations on the
entire town—he
"goes postal"



The game unfolds in an isometric per spective as you wreak

have across 16 increasingly hostile locations. Settings include peaceful neighborlioods, downtown parades, traiter parks, train stations, urban gheltos, and industrial parks. If your Keylar vest holds out, the game culminates in a rather shocking showdown at an Air Force base.

Gameplay is delightfully demented at first, as you was victims who die screaming, often begging for mercy. "Kill me now!" or "I can't breathe!" they wail. In a twist of sick compassion, you can actually stand over their riddled flesh and pump a few last mercy shots into their heads. Eskewise, when you can't take anymore, you can always insert the barrel into your own mouth.

BEYOND POOR TASTE

Designed with juvenile delight by Running With Seissors, POSTAL is both a parody of video-game violence and an excellent example of our desensitized perception of entertainment. Some will find POSTAL hilarious, others will find it downright sickening. Give Ripeord some credit for chutzpah — the company doesn't just push our moral hot button, it smashes it to smithereens. The game dares us to find pleasure in the cold-blooded murder of innocent people.

when all is said and done, the simpleminded carnage at the heart of the game becomes a worn-out novelty.



Graphies are good and bad. On the plus side, the game's hand-drawn backdrops are varied and elaborate. Artistically, however, these watercolor-style backgrounds look like the classroom doudlings of a bored seventh-grader.

Character animations are simplistic and skate erratically above the 2D

framework. Character interaction with the environment is almost nonexistent. Fires that burn in one scene are instantly extinguished when scrolled out of camera view. Had the designers let players interactively vent their rage on structures in the game world, the game would have had more appeal.

The game does have its share of sadistic eye candy, such as victims who spew arterial blood while clawing the ground in agony. Players with DirectX-compatible video cards will also enjoy transparency effects in explosions, fire, and smoke.

Overall, the only envelope POSIM pushes is that of good taste. Otherwise, it's merely a routine shooter designed to delight the commonly morbid minds of preteen boys.



PROTEST THIS In a panody of Postal's real-life controversy, protesters of video-game violence outside the Running With Scissors office are "greeted" by Postal Dude.

From a pure gaming standpoint, however, Postat, holds only limited play value. The level designs are imaginative, and the weapon selection—including machine guns, shotguns, spray cannons, heat-secking missiles, napalm, and flame throwers—are well implemented. But in the long haul, even the most jaded areade gun-freak will find the game repetitive and dull

The game does its best to ensure longterm playability, with a host of singleplayer variations, such as timed levels, body count goals, checkpoints, and capture-the-flag scenarios. Multiplayer games—over modein, IPX, or the internet—also help liven things up. But **DAPPEAL:** Shoot-'em-up fans with a bent sense of humor.

PROS: Good selection of singleand multiplayer game variables; huilt-in level editor; elaborate handdrawn 20 backdrops.

CONS:

Simplistic character animation; repetitive gameplay; cheesy marketing efforts.





Price: \$54.95 Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 90 (P166 recommended), 16MB RAM (32MB recommended), Windows 95/NT or Mac OS 64MB harddrive space, 2x CD-ROM drive (4x recommended). SVGA graphics, Win 95compatible 8-bit sound card (16 bit recommended) **Multiplayer Support:** Modern (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-16 players) Designer: Running With Scissors Publisher: Riccord Games Santa Clara, CA (408) 653-1897 www.ripcordgames.com YARMOOR [YELLOW] BEFEAUS FLATLINER [BLACK] IN A SAMETSONED MATCH ON SOLARIS.

Steve -GroW-> ---- Where shi BW's Banshee go?

IT Change dispWi- a lit shredded my gyrei

I'm out! DEAD!

Stone -GrpW-> ---: I'm gonna need help

- who's left?

HELLO?

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KESMAI





Poor Man's Quake

he format is familiar, the plot, as usual, is Irrelevant CHASM-THE RIFT is a first-person shooter that covers plenty of stock territory There are monsters everywhere, and its your job to clean house with the customary mix of weapons; chain-guns, grenades, mines, and the occasional



STRADDLING THE MIDDLE CHASM uses 3D for its cool monsters, but adheres to a dated 2Dlook for its levels

lightning-firing superveapon. As usual, you'll find health, weapons, and ammo lying around on the floor

Where CHASM distinguishes itself is in its 3D polygonal monsters - they are the best I've seen in a 3D shooter. They are well-animated, moving as if they actually have mass. More striking, though, is the

way they take damage.

With careful aim, you can blow off a monster's arm. That may slow him down, but it won't stop him: He'll still punch you with the other hand. Shoot bis other arm off and hell start kickang until you put one in his brain.

While the monsters are state of the art, the rest of CHASM feels dated. The levels are wonderfully textured and fauly interactive you can shoot out lights and windows-but very 2D. There are no rooms on top of rooms. The



sound and mouse controls are a bit flaky, but the framerate is smooth on a P133 or P266.

CHASM supports network play in either deathmatch or cooperative mode. but cooperative play prevents you from actually working through the levels together. The level design is solid, though not terribly original-just like the entire game &

DOOM fans whose machines aren't up to Quake.

▶PROS: Wonderful, realistic 3D monsters; solid level-editor included.

CONS: There's nothing here we haven't seen before: too many bloody chunks for those who are squeamish.



Price: \$34 99 Minimum System Requirements: 486 DX4/100, Windows 95 or DOS 5 0. 16MB RAM Multiplayer Support: Modem (2 players), LAN Publisher: GT Interactive (612) 559-5301 www.chasm3d.com

MAGESLAYER . REVIEW **

Wizard of Blahs

by Robert Coffey

ACESTAYER's typically unoriginal plot boils down to killing everything in sight while dodging varfour traps. Basically TAKE NO PRISONERS with some halfbaked fantasy, It's a top-down shooter that rehashes the genre's worst elements.

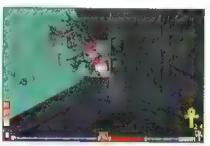
You can play as one of four characters, but gameplay is unaffected by your

choice. Visually, MAGESLAYER is ensp and smooth, provided you have a 3Dfx eard. Even with one, there's a slight but noticeable but in frame rate when large animated objects fill the game screen.

Unlike TNP, MACESLAYER IS stunningly stingy in variety. All five game worlds are populated by the same few monsters, mostly the tired giant scorpion, spider, and rat types. It gets worse, Each character has one measly melee attack and three ranged spells, all of which have an indistinguishable "powered" version.

Like other subpar games. MACESTATER makes the mistake of confusing lots of enemies with challenging gameplay. Monsters attack in huge hordes that, though easy to kill, force ymi into tedious mouse-clicking.

MACESTAYER is filled with traps you've



THE GANG'S ALL HERE MAGESLAYER, WITH ITS pattry and uninspired five worlds, is even less fun than its cousin, Take No Paisoners.

seen a thousand times. To be fair the

game does go beyond the traditional power-up caches by offering some entire gauntlet-running secret levels.

Ultimately, MAGESLAYER is a study in limitations, unredeemed by the tackedon multiplayer options. &

APPEAL: TAKE NO PRISONERS fains who don't mind a much less interesting game,

PROS: Crisp, smooth graphics with 3Dfx card; lots to kill; secret levels,

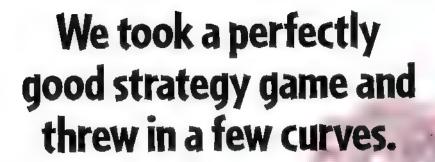
CONS: Incredibly repetitive gameplay; no

variety or originailty in spells, characters, game worlds. traps, melee attacks, and gameplay.





Price: \$44 95 Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 90, Win 95 16MB RAM Multiplayer Support: Modern, null modern (2 players) LAN (2-16 players) Publisher: GT Interactive (716) 871-6646 www.gtinteractive.com



anything like Guardians: Agents of

Justice." Never before has a game so
expertly mixed resource management and
intense superheroic battle. Never before
has the army in a strategy game been a
handful of mutant, superbuff enforcers out to
save tomorrow's planet from its own scum. And never
before have there been such shapely superheroes,
as easy on the eyes as they are rough on the rib cage.
Guardians: Agents of Justice is the superhero strategy
game where you call the shots. You can even
customize your own mighty saviors, in case ours
fail to meet your needs. (Somehow, we doubt it.)



A SUPERHEROIC STRATEGY GAME







Rising Fun

A Lot of Action and Only a Little Strategy

by Robert Coffey



orget 3DO's claim that UPRISING is another entry in the real-time strategy wars—It's an action title, pure and simple, with the merest smattering of strategy. But who cares? With its challenging missions and absorbing gameplay, UPRISING is a real treat

HI-TECH SLUGFEST

While UPRISING has customizable quick-start missions and an excellent intorial, the heart of the game is its bruising campaign mode, which easts gamers as part of a rebel faction buttling the evil intergalactic Imperium. Piloting a roving command center uber-tank, called a Wmith, you'll selze control of power-rich "hot zones" in order to build citaclels, unit buildings, and defenses

While you can call in units to do your dirty work, deft use of the Wrath's impressive destructive capabilities is the key to success in UPRISING. In addition, you can jump between your Wrath and the nearest citadel to seize the citadels guns and take on invaders. Regrettably, you cannot seize control of any of your other units.

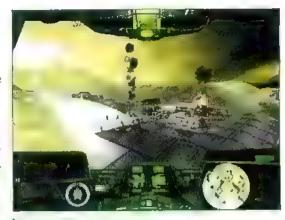
BEST LAID PLANS

Ren Allert base-building gurus, lured by empty promises of a strategy game,

are bound to be let down by the paucity of units and command options. There are only four types of units, and an mability to direct them beyond the basic "Shoot that" command further restricts strategy. If UPROSONG has a strategy element, it is in forcing gamers to adjust their approaches

in order to defeat the Imperium on a mission-by-mission basis. Some planets emphasize defense, some require swift brutal attacks, and others reward a methodical approach. Dealing with the distinctive terrain of each planet heightens the challenge. You'll face lakes of lava, treacherous, sheer cliffs; and rolling hills that conceal blisters containing pumbang turrets

Battles are teeth-gritting spectacles of utter mayhem. Throw in the fact that your own bases may get attacked right when you're in the middle of an on-slaught elsewhere — which forces you to manage multiple battles while dodging Imperium missiles — and keeping plates spinning starts to look easy.



REAL-TIME ACTION Uppasing is deeper than most action shooters, but less carebral than traditional real-time games.

cursor is an tiny you can't find it (especially during a battle), and a few missions have a tendency to lock up your computer. Oh, and good lock trying to play a friend via a direct connection or the internet—both are plagued with player-dropping bugs. Internet play also has latency problems.

Finally, most of the mission objectives are the same—take over all the citadels. They're tough, but they get repetitive Why are there no night missions? What about defensive or infiltration missions?

Still, UPRISING is a blast. If Cyclone Studios had only thrown in the strategy they promised, UPRISING could have been a ground-breaker. §

APPEAL: Action gamers with a taste for some very light strategy.

PPROS: Mix of bruising action and challenging missions make for great gameplay; dynamic game worlds that affect play; much bigger scope than that of other shooters.

>CONS: May be too hard for some;

ne strategic depth; mission goals seldom vary; clumsy controls; buggy modem and internet play.





recommended

Multiplayer Support:
Direct connect, modem (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-4 players)

Designer: Cyclone Studios Publisher: 300

Publisher: 300 Redwood City, CA (650) 261-3000

www.3do.com

2-button mouse, 3Dfx

accelerator card strongly

THE BIG PICTURE You'll do all your base building and management from this satellite view.

UPRISING FALLS DOWN

As enjoyable as
UPRISING is, it has some
significant shortcomings. A
game this tough should
have a way to adjust the difficulty of the missions. The
inability to customize the
joystick controls is a shame,
considering that the default
controls of mouse and keyboard are awkward. In the
overhead satellite view, the

GunJam: bandits, 6 o'clock high!

HiTech: i'm done -- bingo ammo

GunJam: run low -- i'll cover you home

RiToch: regur that me p51 closing fout-

GunJam: pull left! PULL LEFT!

GunJam: HiTech!?!

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All-American Blast

by Rusel DeMaria

f you're feeling destructive, yet morally opright, NUCLEAR STRIKE will let you land a blow for the good of all democratic nations while causing an ungodly amount of destruction to evil world-dictators

You'll pilot a variety of well-armed choppers and a few destructive ground vehicles, such as the hovercraft and the Abrams battle tank. The World War III

storyline unfolds nicely as you fire at identified targets and some unexpected enemies You'll also fly over hidden enemy encampments or hostile boats on the rivers and oceans. From the mament you boot up the game, you'll find there is plenty to do.

The beauty of NUCLEAR STRIM is its ability to combine resource management, strategy, and a sense of a realistically unfolding adventure with a chal-

lenging action product. In regard to graphies, the game is satisfying. While your enemies often look comical and cartoonlike, the various enemy vehicles and gun emplacements are more realishe they inspire dread as you watch their turrets swinging around to point your way

The story is presented in quick cutscenes and short video sequences.

For the most part, the game gives



NUCLEAR BLAST This screen shows several of the configurable options, and the pyrotechnics, that make Nuclear Strike fun to play.

more than adequate feedback and allows

enough customization to make it satisfying for players of all skill levels.

In the end, NUCLEAR STRIKE manages to be a fascinating, challenging, and varied experience with plenty of gameplay to justify the price of admission. %

PAPPEAL: Action fans, especially followers of the STRIKE series, who like some story and strategy.

PROS: Great graphics that simulate a 3D landscape; nonstop action; combination of compelling story and high-intensity

action.

CONS: Objectives sometimes confusing: story can be sometimes unclear.





Minimum System Requirements: Pentum 133 (P90 with 3Dfx), Windows 95. 16MB RAM Multiplayer Support: Publisher: Electronic (415) 571-7171 www.ea.com

Price: \$49.95

SHIPWRECKERS! • REVIEW ***

A Pirate's Life for PC

by Matthew Schaefer

igh on the seven seas, the scurvy pirate Blowfleet has wreaked his havoc for far too long. As a rival pirate with a thirst for adventure, you must capture this renegade and take his treasure and glory from him

The world of SEIPWRECKERS!, however, is not a serious one. It offers lighthearted shooting action with plenty of humor. Most of the gameplay consists of navigating through inlets, spits, and locks



AVAST! A sturdy galleon has raised the Jolly Roger over a looted town

in pursuit of floating bottles that open up new map areas. This introduces a puzzle element to the game.

You'll blow through ships, flamethrowers, and bomb-dropping parrots on your way to raising the fully Roger over enemy ports. Your galleon can also be transformed into an airship, get trapped in giant air bubbles, become a speedy steamship, and gain a number of extra weapons -- such as surface-to-air mis-

siles - to supplement your cannons.

SHIPWRECKERS! requires the use of a 3D accelerator, but the graphics are impressive. Although the camera angle is movable, the default isometric view provides the best shots of the action.

The only annoying aspect of SHIPWRECKERSI is the console-style game saving Players start with three ships (fives), but can save only after completing a level. This limited save option tried my patience, as I had to

replay levels again and again.

Despite this. Shipwrk.cxcrs! provides console-style gaming with a refreshing dose of wackiness. SHIPAVRECKERSI can provide you with seafaring excitement as few other games can. %

APPEAL: Action fans and wouldbe pirates who want some humor in their swashbuckling.

PROS: Interesting puzzies and challenging enemies; imaginative power-ups and ship transformations: good-looking 3D graphics; humorous atmosphere.

ECONS: Annoying savegame feature necessitates tiring replay of levels.





Price: 550 Minimum System Requirements: P133 Win 95, 16MB RAM 3D accel card Multiplayer Support: Linked joystick/gamepad (2-5 players) Publisher: Psygnosis (800) 438-7794

www.psygnosis.com



Fun-Defying Action

Avalon Hill's Action Premiere Descends Into the Clone Caverns

by Thierry Nguyen

is hard to break into the action game genre. You either have a product with the requisite revolutionary feature or you have a derivative product that disappears into mediocrity. Availon Hills first action game,

DEFIANCE, falls into the latter entegory. While the game has some good ideas and features, a few factors pull it down from the iter of innovation and reduce it to nothing more than a DESCENT clone.



DEFIANCE's plot is an attempt at sci-fi mystery. You are a test pilot for an experimental fighter craft to be used at an intergalactic war. When your base is attacked, you have to mot out the culprits and punish them. Most of the game is spent unraveling the mystery of the base attackers. Once you do, the game becomes a simple matter of saving yourself by destroying all enemics.

The plot moves along via voiceovers and out-scenes between the B levels. The out-scenes aren't very impressive, but I like the use of voiceovers to further the plot. Though the technique is a far cry from the FMV in JEDE KNIGHT, it's a definite step beyond the text treatment used in other games.

ROBOTS VS. ROBOTIC CRITTERS

Though DEPIANCE is like DESCENT, the main difference between the two is that in DEPIANCE your ship doesn't naturally defy gravity. There is no rolling or hovering; you have to use vertical thrust to "hop" around. It felt as if I was controlling a robot rather than a spacecraft The weapons are divided into guns and missiles — most of which are stock shooter fare.

The enemies — all biomechanical monstrosities — boast nice animation, but are themselves unimpressive. Their colors are monotonous, and they always seem to use the simple Al routine of



BIGGER THAN NIAGARA There's Direct3D support, but it's not used very effectively.

"guns from a distance, headbutt when close"

NO X TO MARK THE SPOT HERE

The level design resembles real locations, such as cityscapes and laboratories, which are better than the confusing, claustrophobic mines of DESCENT. The flip side to this, though, is the lack of a map. This is aggravating, especially because the levels are huge and are composed of many similar-looking twists and tunnels.

Also, the graphics aren't terribly impressive. The use of Direct3D seems to be more for boosting frame rate than for adding visual effects—the graphics seem closer to the original Descent than to today's visually impressive games.

The save-game feature is odd, the game allows you to save only at certain computer consoles scattered throughout the levels. While that's not quite as bad as in DARK FORCES, it strikes me as stupid—especially considering that there's a cheat described in the READ.ME file that allows you to save whenever you want. Why should saving be a cheat, rather than an option?

In the end, DEFIANCE is an adequate start for Avalon Hill's new Visceral



THOSE WACKY ALIENS The enemies feature nice animation, but as a whole, they aren't very memorable or very impressive.

Productions action line. Some elements, such as the story-driving voiceovers, are nice, but the lack of a map, the less-than-stellar graphics, and the save-game "feature" end up making it just another DESCENT clone. §

BESCENT, but want something less claustrophobic and more mysterious.

PROS: Good attempt at using voiceovers to tie the plot together;

good enemy animation.

>CONS: Lack of automap; odd save-game feature; unimpressive graphics.



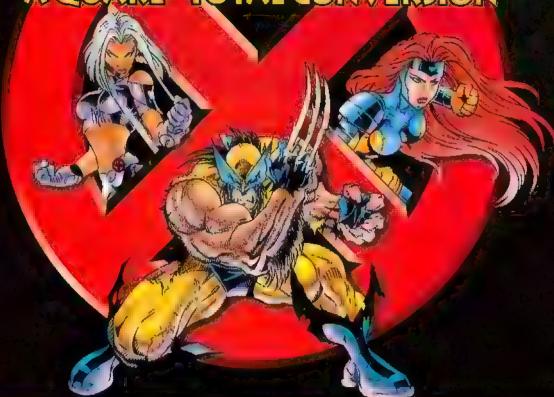


Price: \$49 99 Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 90, 16MB RAM, Windows 95 40MB hard-drive space, 2x CD-ROM VGA-graphics card Windows 95-compat ble sound cards Multiplayer Support: Modem, senal (2 players), LAN (2-8 players) Designer: Logicware Publisher: Visceral Productions/Avalon-Hi.l. Baltimore, MD (800) 999-3222 www.avalonhill.com



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Uh-Oh

Origin's Epic Online Game Is Snared by Bugs and Design Problems



HIDE HARVEST Someone was tough enough to take on a herd of cows but left their hides behind, probably due to the cowhide surplus.

by Thierry Nguyen

grandest design spee of any game to be released this year. To create a virtual world based on the world of Britannia. Not content with the simple online monsterthwacking of Dianto, Lord British set out to create a virtual community with Uprata ONLINE. The vision involved creating a dynamic game world in which players were free to live their virtual lives; whether they be bakers or dragonslayers, Essentially, ULTIMA ONLINE was to be a grand-scale, graphical multiuser dungeon (MUD). Unfortunately, despite the grandiose and well-meaning inten-

t was perhaps the simplest, yet

Minimum System
Requirements: P133
or better, 16MB RAM,
Windows 95, 261MB
hard-drive space, 4x
CD-ROM SVGA graphics card, Windows 95compatible sound
card internet

Price: \$59 99 plus

\$9.95 per month

connection
Multiplayer Support:
As many players as
the server can hold
Designer: Origin
Publisher:
Electronic Arts
San Mateo, CA
(800) 245-4525

www.origin.ea.com

MULTIPLE AVATARS

ULTIMA ONLINE down.

ULTIMA ONLINE opens with a typically well-done Ongin cut-scene that portrays the slaying of Mondatn and the shattening of the Gern of Immortality. In each shard of the gern is a perfect replica of Sosaria, the game world of ULTIMA ONLINE.

tions, there are many factors that pull

Basically, this use of the "shards of Sosaria" plot is used to explain the

multiple servers. As of this writing, there were six servers, five serving the various regions and one Test Server in which Origin experiments with proposed changes. When you sign up for an ULTIMA ONLINE account, you pay \$9.95 a month to use up to five characters per server

Character generation is a pretty quick affair You select the three skills in which you want to excel, modify your stats, and then alter your appearance with options

such as hair color, facial hair-style, and skin tone. Then, you gwe yourself a name and optional password, pick a town and not to start in, and coter Britannia.

You start the game with 100 gold pieces and some basic equipment (based on which primary skills you selected). After that, you're on your own There's no overarching goal, no Foozle to vanquish,

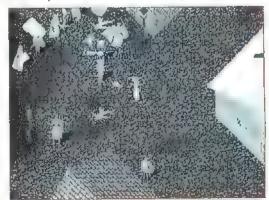
no treasure to seek. Just enter the world and play your character as you see fit

SUPER AVATAR BROTHERS, AGAIN?

At first glance, the game engine looks a lot like an SVCA-graphics version of the UtaiMA VIII engine. You get the 3/4 slanted view of the landscape, as In-ULTIMA VIII or CRUSADER, rather than the more aerial perspective used in earlier ULTMAS. You still have the staple movement interface of ULHMA VII and beyond, in which you hold down the right button to walk about and doubleleft-click on items to use them Thankfully, unlike Utstata VIII, there are no contrived platform-game-style puzzles. What we end up with is the graphically enhanced version of the ULTIMA VIII engine, only using the ULTIMA VII interface

ULTIMA ONLINE is a skills-based game, which means that you improve your skills and stats by practicing. You can eather receive training from NPCs or just take the time to practice your skill over and over again until it improves.

As of now, combat is also a clickingaffair, though it's not quite as frantic as DIABIAD's combat. To fight something, you need to enter "combat" mode, and then double click on your target. The



DEATH BECOMES ME When you die and come back as a ghost, the world goes black and white, and you're forced to wander the Earth until someone resurrects you.

vanous skills at play will be checked against each other, and you'll be notified on whether or not you made contact. Origin also wants to give the player an autocombat option, with which the player will select a predefined fighting style and the computer will then carry out combat, though this feature is not implemented yet.

THE LAG DAEMON STRIKETH

So, after learning these essentials, you just need to sign on and go have yourself an adventure-filled virtual life, right? Not quite Unfortunately, ULTIMA ONLINE, has a host of problems and setbacks.

First, this article gives you just a bit less than what the game's documentation tells you. When you open the box, the first thing you notice is the lack of a real manual. Yes, you get a decent reference card and install guide, but no meaty manual. The only options for a manual are an online document on Origin's Website or the strategy guide, which you have to buy separately.

When you install the game, you'll have to devote 261MB to the nummum install. Unfortunately, this runs quite slow, For smoother gameplay, you're going to have to give the game half a gig (so that the game runs off the hard drive instead of the CD)

Once you log on, you will invariably encounter the principle problem with the game: bags. Origin is busy making patches and makes you download them when you sign on; it seemed that every time I logged on, I watched the "downloading/applying patch" screen do its work.



TALKING HEADS Not only is text hard to read when it overlaps, but these NPCs spew out long paragraphs detailing quests, and then forget all about them moments later.

The bugs are perpetual, as every time some are fixed, new ones will pop up. For example, as of press time, Notoriety is still buggy. This means that I could kill an Ore that threatened to fall Lord British's mother, only to be marked as a "Dread Lord," yet I could gain the title of "Noble" by giving fish away. Other bugs include the ability to generate large amounts of money via cloning, and the ability to become an instant Grandmaster by paying an NPC to train you.

The other huge obstacle in this game is lag time. The smoothest gameplay came for me when I was playing in the wee hours of the night (about 2–3 a.m. PST). Whenever I played in the afternoon, the server was clogged, and not only did the lug time make my character teleport around the area, but it also bouted me off with numerous server enables.

DUMB AND DUMBER

There are some other game issues, as well. The NPCs are extremely moronic, as they will ofter you quests and then for-

get about them moments later ("Go killeth Sir Davus," you'll be tok! You then ask, "Where is Sir Davus?" The response: "I know not of what you speaketh, knave")

Also, the economy is thrown off balance, due to the fact that everyone who has come before you has already killed all the creatures and bilked the NPCs out of their money. The only way you can thwack some creatures is to wait for a creature to respawn or to move to a less populated area.

Practicing skills takes hours upon hours of cheking. If you

thought Diable was a click-fest, you haven't tried improving your swords-maiship by attacking practice dummies for three hours. And finally, player-killing ("PKing") is rumpant. While PKing is actually a legitimate form of role-playing, the reason so many people do it is because its much more fun than playing UO "the real way," in which you must do a series of monotonous/repetitive tasks in order to be strong enough to kill anything larger than a pig.

Unima Online is a game with untapped potential. The game has great aspirations, but is plagued by bugs, horrible lag-time, and some design issues. As of now, you should get UTIMA ONLINF only if you are willing to put up with a whole lot of grief, all the time. If you simply want to go out and thwack creatures with friends, stick to DIABLO. If you have the patience to put up with the numerous changes and putfalls of Utima ONLINE, and would like to try living a "virtual" life, go ahead and try. As for me, I'll stick to real life for now.

Reviewing an Online Game

evolving. Because it is online, it is forever changing, both for better and for worse. There will always be bugs, and patches to fix those bugs, which create further bugs, and so on. By the time you read this issue, the game may have undergone a radical makeover.

As it stands now, based on what's in the box, the game's illaws outweights features. Yet there is so much potential that Urma Online could become a truly great game. But we can't review potential, we can only review concrete product. As of this writing, this is our position on Urma Online. Should the game go through a major overhaul and become a great online game, it will be addressed again later. You can count on CGW to keep you posted, should any monumental changes occur.

***APPEAL:** Patient gamers interested in graphical MUDs, or a "virtual community."

PROS: If played correctly, it can be a real role-playing experience; decent graphics.

COMS: Numerous and never-ending

bugs; herrible lagtime; design issues lead to repetitive and time-consuming activities; unbalanced economy; rideulously bigh system requirements.



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MUD Fight!

Online Warfare Gets Deeper With Meridian 59 Revelation

by Barry Brenesal

esting on your laurels is dangerous. They can cusily turn into poison ivy, with painful results. With no serious competition, 3DO's popular MERUDIAN 59 has been doing just that as the preeminent graphical multiuser dungeon (MUD)

for the last year. Now, with ULTIMA ONLINE out, and looming threats from Microsoft's ASHERON'S CALL and Sony's EVERQUEST, 3DO's producers have turned their attention back to MERIDIAN 59. But can their new REVELATION upgrade - and the

promise of another soon to come - save MERIDIAN 59 from a MUDslide in popularity toward newer online games?

BODY SHOP

MERIDIAN 59 is set in a pseudomedieval fantasy universe. You use magic and muscle to battle monsters. Along the way, you gather treasure, meet friends. and find fame; of course, occasionally you die.

Your character begins in the town of Raza, in a small, safe area set aside for new arrayals to learn the command set. Micirpian 59 lets you customize your character's appearance in regard to hair style, mouth shape, eye color, skin color. and gender Finally, you apply 50 points against stats in six categories: might, intellect, stamma, aguity, mysticism, and aim,

Unlike most of the competition, MERIDIAN 59 does not supply a mix of fantasy mees and professions, so don't expect to unveil that Dark Elven Sorcerer you always wanted to be in your black heart of hearts. You customize your character by seeking out one of six schools, each of which offers unique benefits to the miliate who, over time, fulfills its numerous quests. The Temple of Shal'ille teaches healing, blessing, and protection spells, for instance, while Faren Temple instructs you in bard-tocontrol attack spells.

When your character eventually learns all the spells in a single school, you can choose another and follow a similar

KILLING TIME

To PK or not to PK, that is the next question. MERIDIAN 59 has a reputation as a player killer's paradise, and it's not without reason. The game's structure of clublike guilds encourages player conflict. With only 14 guilds allowed at any given time, many guild-wannabes organize infiltrations and assaults upon guild halfs. The benefits of successful takeovers are too sweet to ignore; a private communications channel between all guild members; a building closed to all nonmembers (except by permission); a body of friends to provide instant rescue or support; and a guild chest to hold your surplus goods and keep them safe

> from loss, which usually occurs when you die

Players who want to engage in a more sportsmanlike, one-on-one ditel to the death typically frequent the combat-samelioned zone of the Arena; but there's also a goodly share of nonconsentual PK'ang in MERIDIAN 59 The game's Dungeon Masters give this activity free reinoutside a few safe reas, such as lowns, since murdered players

spawn Revenants, powerful Al-controlled entters that stalk their killers relentlessly until either the morderer or the Revenant dies. Since a murderer and his pals can bond together to kill a Revenant, however, this isn't always an effective solution

This MUD is not just about combat. and death, though; MERIDIAN 59 offers a social atmosphere, with many cities



Price: \$9 95 retail (with a week's worth of free sessions) or free download from 300's Web site (with no free sessions). Online charges, \$2 49/day, \$7.50/week (based on 4 days free after playng 3 days/week) Minimum System Requirements: Windows 95, 486/66 or higher, 8MB RAM, 35MB hard-drive space, 2x CD ROM drive.

14 4Kbps modem. SVGA-graphics monitor, SLIP/PPP Net connection Multiplayer Support:

Designer/Publisher:

Redwood City, CA (650) 261-2777

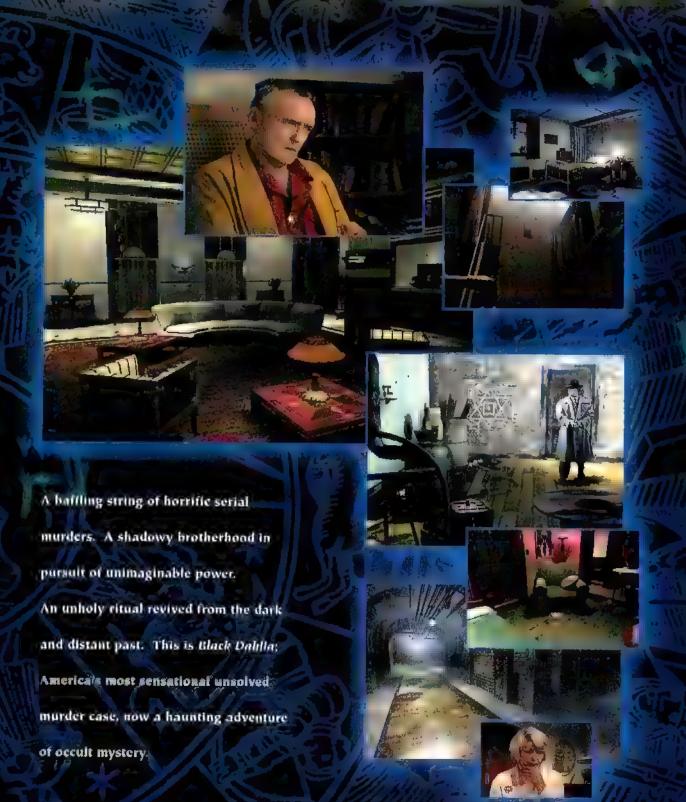
www.3do.com



JUNGLE BOOGIE Nicely textured tropical forests add to Revelation's atmosphere.

questing path, but the learning curve for new spells or improved weapons skills increases dramatically with each successive school you choose to affiliate with. While this admittedly prevents the development of supercharacters, it also places a ceiling on training, which can frustrate players who like aiming for that next spell or obscure talent that lies just over the magical horizon





- From the creators of Ripper a superior coryline inspired by actual events.
- Asstronaingly rendered, amountingly real S.Dimensional game world that includes over 70 locations on two continents
- · More than 60 challenging and seamlessly integrated puzzles
- A unique interface which immerses you in the alltimate adventure game experience.
- An outstanding cont of professional actors starring Dennis Hoppets
 Beri Gage and Darren Eliker.



More PK'ing Ahead

to meet Memous 50 appraise, titled Resonance, is expected in the second quarter of '0 it will apply the improved graphical capabilities of Re'catan to Memous 59's, two major cities, The and Reza. The engine that ancigns quotis to players will also be revised to permit on-the-fly changes. Expect a much greater diversity of quotis, as well as penalties associated with timed quotis that aren't completed on achodule.

Physicismics will primarily focus on expanding the gene's player-killing aspect. To of a new region controlled by an axil, magically inclined fluore possits characters lecromancers, who gain powerful spells but need to kill other players regularly. On speaking its opposite, and players will also be offered the choice of locoming burners, who have characted weapons and tracking skills—and are the address destroyers of Necromancers.

NOT ALL THAT'S EVIL IS UGLY
Here's a lich you can expect to must,
In Meridian's Renaissance module.

and shops. This social atmosphere, however, would be improved if Dinigeon Masters took more control over the names players were pennitted to use in the game. On several recent occasions when I logged on, some of the most vol-

uble players had names that were illegal drugs and sexual puns. Sure, you can block out their comments using your Options panel, but then you'd have to block out other players who refer to them, too. And there's no way to block out their physical presence.

MEET THE NEW BOSS

When Meridian 59 was originally released in September 1996, its graphics could best be described as serviceable. Now, however, the game is visually dated. The washed-out, poorly textured images look flatter and more unappetizing than ever.

Pirst and foremost, the new REMELATION module adds land mass to MERBEAN 59—the world is suddenly 33 percent larger, thanks to the "recently discovered" tropical island of Ko'catan, 'The Island also supplies more visual textures and contoured surfaces—its main population center is a fine example of city dwellings perched upon hilly slopes. Ko'catan is home to a hidden temple, covert passagewhys, mazelike catacombs, and altractively detailed forests.

REVIDIATION features 30 new NPCs, intrigating puzzles, and plenty of critters.

Critter AI is improved, as well.

Though we've yet to see anything in a multiplayer environment to match Director Realais' AI (in which monsters make intelligent battle decisions based upon such factors as spell capaci-

PLAY NICE The NPCs in Revelation are moody—they will raise their prices if you annoy them.

ty, health, physical footing, enemy distance, and numbers of friends and foes in the mom), the monsters in REVELATION supply a greater diversity of personalities and strategies. For example, the three birdlike Avar tribes constantly war among themselves as well as against players, and the devastating effects of their Shamans' Earthquake spell should not be underestimated — even by veteran breakdancers

There are great new spells in REMELATION, with a new school of magic and a general refurbishing of extant spells that brings the total number of spells to more than 100. One spell in par-

tienfar deserves mention. Tame. Use it on an unintelligent monster you're fighting, and you may gain a large pet to follow you and fight your battles.

Overall, the changes made to MERIDIAN 59 in REMELATION — a larger

world, significantly improved graphics, more varied quests and spells - really make a difference On the eve of several important graphical multiplayer releases, this MUD provides competition that cannot be ignored. In the final analysis, MERIDIAN 59's social and role-playing aspects are given less structural emphasis then combut, and it's for combat that you should turn to this game. There are better MUD venues for role-playing and socializing, but few multiplayer games deliver as many well-structured opportunities for restless adventurers who

want to work out their aggressions as does MERIDIAN 59 %

APPEAL: Online multiplayer gamers, particularly combat-oriented ones.

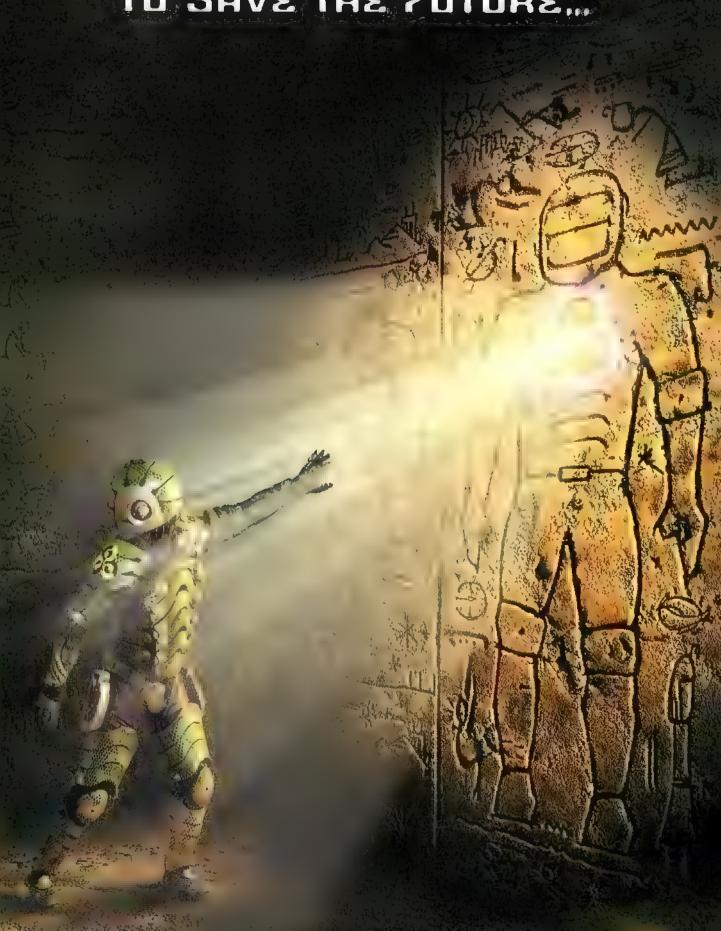
PPROS: Lots of spells to learn and critters to fight; a great quest system; large environment to explore; excellent interface; light

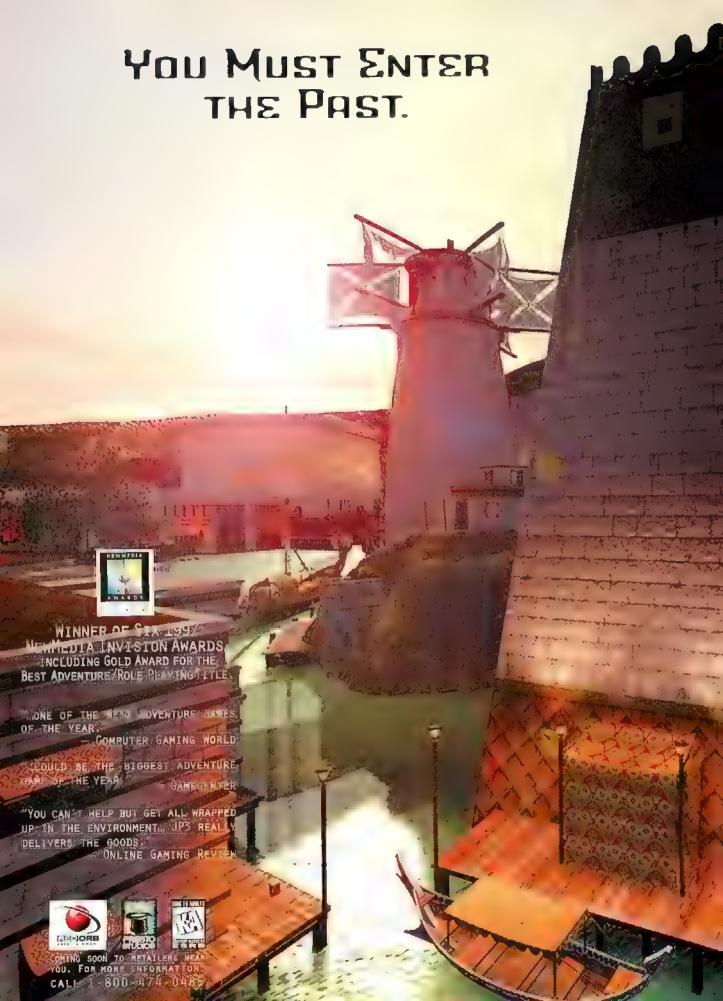
on computer resources.

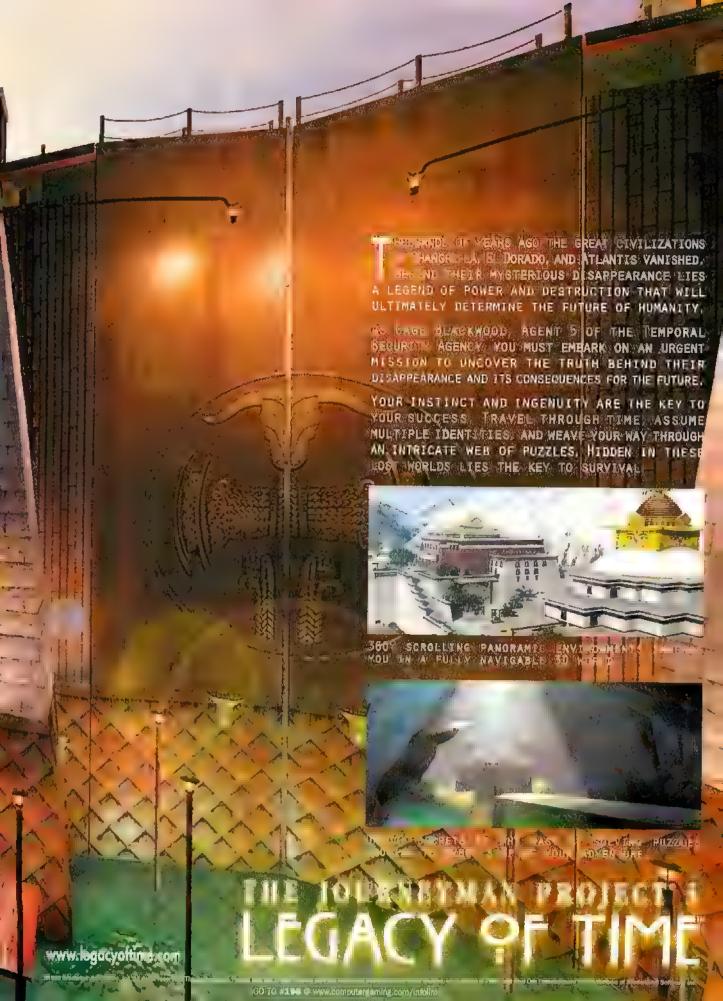
PK (player-killer) element; online costs can sneak up on you.



TO SAVE THE FUTURE...









The Bitter End

A Great Action/Adventure Hybrid — Until the Terrible Endgame

by Robert Coffey



hile there have been action/ adventure game hybrids since the days of IT CAME PROMITHE DESERT, the last year has seen a boom in this niche. With games

such as REALMS OF THE HAUNTING, TWINSEN'S OLYSSIN, and THE LAST EXPRESS, action/adventure hybrids seem to have come of age, and it's about time Done right, the introduction of action elements to an adventure game only draws the player deeper into the story. The life and death struggles add an immediacy frequently lacking in traditional adventures. DARK EARTH is the latest entry into this burgeoning genre, and it's a winner—until a truly boneheaded endgame spoils it all.

WHO TURNED OUT THE LIGHTS?

DARK EARTH takes place in the aftermath of an apocalypse 300 years in Earth's future. According to the backstory, a gigantic comet passed too close to the planet, resulting in global decimation (courtesy of fiery meteontes). A thick pall of black soot immediately filled the air, plunging the world into constant, choking darkness. The few survivors wandered the planet for generations, battling fearsome creatures born of the perpetual night. They finally discovered a precious few islands where shafts of hight cut through the smog.

These raised cities, or stallites, became oases for mankind

Thus saved, mankind started worshipping the sun as a god, led by hely Sunseers who were protected and aided by their militia, the Guardians of Pire.

You are cast as Arkhan, a member of the Guardians of Fire, and the son of one of the Sunseers. While saving the holiest Sunseer of Sparta from an assassination attempt, you are poisoned by a Konkolite. The very essence of the bitter



TALL, DARK, AND SCABBY The contaminated Arkhan looks even more butt-ugiy next to the beautifully rendered game environments.

darkness now courses through your veins, corrupting your body, mind, and soul. As the game hits its stride, you must find a cure while fighting the forces of darkness in order to save the planet.

The story in DARK EARTH is rich and compelling. Filled with betrayals, tragedy, and heroism, the plot fairly gallops along, introducing new characters and side plots as it drives the game forward. There is a sense of urgency in everything Arkhan does, abetted in no

small part by the creeping progress of his disease, which worsens in realtune. It's an interesting combination—as game events are triggered by your actions, Arkhan's deterioration worsens. Fortunately, the disease moves slowly, and while it does keep you moving, it doesn't prevent you from completing the game.

WORLD OF RUIN

The world of DARK EARTH is an intriguing assortment of dichotomies. The regal splendor of Sparta stands in sharp contrast to the poverty of the Lower City The primitive and scientific coexist. For instance, most weapons are swords and



Software

Alameda, CA 94501

www.microprose.com

(510) 522-1164



COME GET SOME As the darkness starts enguilfing Sparta, Arkhan will have to fight hideous mutants in addition to simple humans gone bad.

daggers, yet there are simple guns to be found (although they are steam-powered)

The unique game world is beautifully rendered in screen after gorgeous screen. DARK EARTH's environments are lush and detailed, even in 256-color mode. More than mere eye candy, the game's rich design paints an imaginatively conceived reality that encompasses dank sewers, cerie underwater ruins, and the towering matesty of Sparta's temple. While there's some simple movement in the environments, the world is predominantly static and noninteractive.

DARK EARTH's animated out-scenes are similarly outstanding. While not visually ground-breaking, these cut-scenes are easily the most exciting I've seen in a game They push the action forward Instead of just serving as a simple reward for a solved puzzle. The only problem I had with the cut-scenes is that they occasionally caused the game to crash,

Arkhan and the numerous NPCs he nicets are polygonal 3D characters in a 2D world. While not as sharply drawn as their surroundings, the characters don't look glaringly out of place, although their movements occasionally seem awkward, particularly when characters

go up or down stairs (they hover about an Inch above every step). Also, Arkhan has a fairly large "tangle zone". He gets hung up on the edges of objects and walls rather easily

GETTING AROUND SPARTA

Arkhan can freely explore the world, with all movement options handled by an easy-to-master, though noncustemizable. combination of Shift, Ctrl. and arrow keys. A gamepad may also be used, though it

also can't be customized. DARK FARIH's inventory system is simple and intuitive and allows you to assign numbers to up to nine weapons.

Saving games may be a sticking point for some gamers. Only nine games can be saved, they can't be named, and they



20 FEET OR SO UNDER THE SEA While DARK EARTH'S game world is relatively small, there's enough variety in locations that things never get stale.

can be saved only at certain locations. Flowever, save points are liberally sealtered about the game world, and gamers shouldn't find themselves replaying large segments of the game if they save wisely and often.

Interacting with objects is a simple matter of maneuvering Arkhan to the desired object and lutting the space bar Kalisto has added a twist though, with a "mood" meter that can be toggled between Arkhan's light (normal) and dark (contaminated) natures, Some things may be accomplished only if Arkhan is appropriately nasty, particulurly when it comes to finding some objects. If scarching a room is frustrat-

> ingly fruitless, give in to the dark side and start angrily searching the place - exlds are you'll find something.

DARK EARCH'S gameplay is as effortless as its controls. In fact, the game bends over backward to keep things from getting too difficult. While gamers can control Arkhan Incombat, simply holding down the Ctrl key in combat mode will let the computer do all your dirty work.

The puzzles in the game are generally inventory-based, logical, and tied into the story. The game keeps things simple by solving the more complicated puzzles for you. The game automatically assembles inventory items into new, necessary objects, It's great for beginning gamers, but

PLEASED TO MEETCHA!

Frequent Interaction with

NPCs such as this, um,

"exotic dancer," named

Delia, enrich and propel

DARK EARTH'S plot

annoying for gamers looking for more of a challenge.

THE BIG PROBLEM

So, if DARK FARIITIS such an enjoyable, solid game, why are we giving it only 3.5 stars? Because the end of the game flat-out sucks. Kalisto really dropped the ball here After the final save point, you have to work your way through a maze bristling with spinning blades, then fight a monster you can stun but not kill, all the while desperately trying to move

some levers in some secret manner to get to the end of the game. Negotiating the maze is tough, if only because nothing in the game prepares you for the space bar's sudden ability to make Arkhan duck — I died a lot before finding out that one.

Also, the game needs a saving opportunity after the maze, since the boss at the end will kill you scores of times. which forces you to go through the muze again and again. And any game that expects you to figure out the correct sequence to pull some levers (without even an obscure buit) while some invincible beast pounds on your head has just failed Came Design 101. It's so frestratingly difficult that it runs the game.

DARK EARTH has a lot going for it. It looks good, it sounds good, the story is great, and it's not too lough - perfect for beginners. But the ending is so disappointing you'll need lots of forgiveness in your heart to get over it %

PAPPEAL: Veteran gamers looking for a good story, beginning gamers looking for a good introduction, all with a saintlike ability to deal with the horrible ending.

PROS: Great plot and stunning graphics create an outstanding game world; easy controls; fantastic cutscenes; smooth blend of adventure and action gaming.

CONS: Experienced gamers may find it too easy; sporadic crashes;

steep system requirements for all features; the endgame may damage your monitor (when your fist goes through it).





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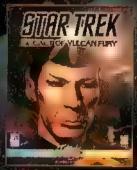


Bottom line Secret of Vulcan Fury is set to become the ultimate Star Trek game ever."

-Adrenati - Vaul

interplays attention to graphic detail has resulted in a stunningly lifelike synthetic revival of the classic Star Trek players."

PC Gamer













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Mystery Lesson

History Mixes With Murder for an Intriguing Adventure

by Allen Greenberg

trategically located near the Black Sea at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, Istanbul has enjoyed a colorful and often tempestuous history. It is that history, viewed through the eye of modern technology, which is the subject of BYZANTINE: THE BETRAYAL. A Discovery Channel Multimedia release, this intiguing adventure combines computergenerated graphics and live action.

You play a reporter known for your keen eye and journalistic acumen, who becomes caught up in an investigation of sloten artifacts from historic sites in Istanbul. The game was "filmed" largely on location, and thus includes many of these sites. However, the live action forms only part of the game. The investigation leads you to an amazing computer simulation of some of the sites as they appeared several hundred years earlier. For example, there is a visit to the palace of Süteyman I, who ruled from 1520–66

Flowever, someone has sabataged these simulations, possibly to hide the theft of hidden antiques. To repair the simulations, you "scan" the real sites as they exist today. The seans are then unloaded to a computer. You use the computer to sort them and assign them to their proper place as you visit a computer-generated fantasyland. Once the simulation has been repaired, you are free to explore the maxes and puzzles within, Remember, however, that someone else has already explored this simulated territory and removed the treasures that you will uncover. Your job is to find that person or persons. And, of course, while all of this is happening, a mysterious assassin is after your blood



Price: \$49 95

Minimum System

Pent um 90, Windows

Requirements:

Support: None.
Publisher: Discovery
Channel Multimed a
Distributor:
Interplay
Irvine, Calif

(714) 553 6655

www.interplay.com

CHECK YOUR REFLEXES

The puzzles in BYZANTINE are not particularly difficult, although there are moments in the game when quick action is called for in order to escape death.



ESTANBUL (NOT CONSTANTINOPLE) Byzantine. The Betraval features beautiful scenes of modern-day Istanbul.

However, a convenient built-in function automatically saves your game just before the entical moment. You can then replay it until you get it right. There are moments, particularly in the endgame, when a bit more time to accomplish certain tasks would have been appropriate. Also, the view is moonsistent as

you move from place to place, which can leave you disoriented and unsure of which way you're facing.

I-lints as to what to try next are also built into the game. They won't tell you everything, but they can be helpful at times. The plot is essentially linear, but there are many places to explore and people to talk to in the real world. Each time someone mentions a new location in Istambul, that place appears on your map of the city. Before long, your map becomes quite full and you can visit any location on the map simply by clicking on it.



Unfortunately, the game did not always run smoothly. At a certain point, key people in the story simply didn't show up—which essentially froze the game.

Discovery insisted that BYZANTINE had



WAY-BACK MACHINE Interspersed with your travels through modern Istanbul are virtual re-creations of historic sites in the region's past

been extensively tested, and it even provided saved games that circumvented the problem. Users should beware, however, that the potential for trouble exists.

BYZANTINE is not a classic game, and it has a few minor problems, but it should provide adventure lovers with some enjoyable hours before its conclusion.

PAPPEAL: Traditional adventure gamers, history buffs.

PROS: Intriguing story; skillful mixture of real life and computer-generated graphics.

Inconsistent views when moving from one place to another; some game bugs midway through game.







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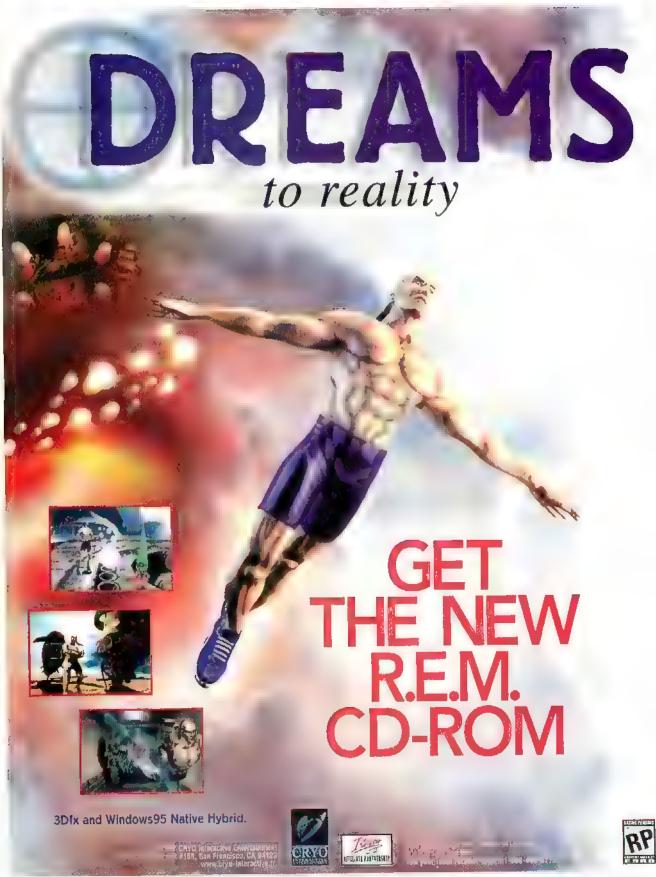
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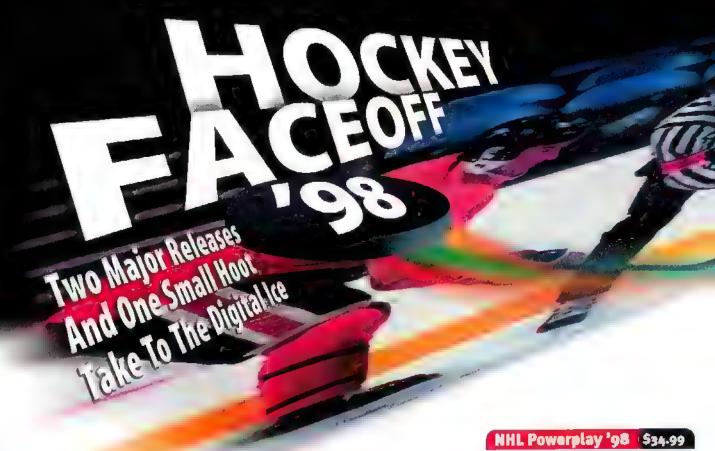
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by Gordon Goble

And the gloves are off!

It's been a long wait, but EA Sports' all-dominant NHL HOCKEY series finally has some worthy competition in the battle for Lord Stanley's Digital Mug. It comes in the form of Virgin Interactive's NHL POWERPLAY '98, the second installment of the title designed by Radical Entertainment (BRETT HULL HOCKEY 95).

Radical has gone the 3D route this time around, adding some glossy oomph to the lovely artificial intelligence of their first effort, last year's NHL POWERPLAY 96. Meanwhile, EA's hot-off-the-press NHL 98 exhibits revamped Al and a marginal reworking of its already superb graphic engine. There's no doubt whatsoever that this pair sits atop the PC hockey world and it's probably no coincidence that both are developed in and around hockey-mad Vancouver, Canada.

But that's not to say there aren't other alternatives. Lovers of silly sports may find solace in GT Interactive's NHL OPEN ICE, and that's covered here too. Then there's the also-rans, recent titles you should still find in the minor leagues (er...discount bins)—Time Warner's WAYNE GRETZKY AND THE NHLPA ALL-STARS and Empire Interactive's SOLID ICE come to mind. In any case, Acclaim's NHL BREAKAWAY 98, due by year-end, will have to work out its rookie jitters amongst the company of two very strong players.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS (2D): 486/66, 2x CD-ROM drive, SoundBlaster-compatible sound card, 2MB VGA video card. (3D): Pentium 133, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive, SoundBlaster-compatible sound card, Direct 3D accelerator card, gamepad.

DESIGNER: Radical Entertainment

PUBLISHER: Virgin Interactive Entertainment, Irvine, CA. 800-VIECOM1 www.vie.com

Smart Player

Ever since Radical Entertainment took what they learned from its innovative but sloppy BRETT HULL HOCKEY 95 and stuck it into the NHL POWERPLAY mold, hockey playin' gamers have been talking about the possibilities of a merger between this level of smarts and something other than its relatively antiquated and sprite-filled 2D uni-camera graphics.

Now, Radical has granted their wishes with NHL POWERPLAY 98, a title that's got looks and brains. Again with the blessings of both the National Hockey League and the NHL Player's Association, they've fashioned the closest hockey package ever to what is arguably one of the top sports games of all time, EA Sports' NHL HOCKEY. But, though POWERPLAY remains the best "substance" hockey there is, especially in single-player mode where the program's Al is truly tested, little weaknesses keep it from taking the crown.



Net Gains

Visually, Radical programmers have introduced motion-captured players and a 3D environment. They've also offered up no less than five roving cameras, and if you gloss over the small stuff or choose a distant perspective the overall appearance is pretty close to state-of-the-art.

But up close you'll see curiously angular players that look even more un-rounded from certain perspectives, become awfully skinny from the side, and turn into static little blockmen when they hit the bench. Ice surfaces and crowds sometimes "ripple" as they approach the forefront, pucks may momentarily disappear in the corners, and skaters appear a bit too large for the ice surface.

If you're anything like me, you'll finally settle on the relatively distant Overhead cam. Here, you won't get quite the same sensation of 3D, but you will see enough of the ice surface to get a good read on what everybody's doing and lose all of the nitpicky irritants addressed above.

The original POWERPLAY featured gameplay options galore, and nothing has been lost in this version. Including defensive and offensive positioning, player trades, the ability modify or switch off virtually every major real-life rule, and much more. After each contest, you'll be greeted with a battery of stats and a three-star selection with real player head shots. Season lengths are variable, as are playoff rounds.

POWERPLAY's entire menu system is gamepad-driven, which I found quite inconvenient, with an annoying and constant involuntary scroll that had me "exiting" instead of "starting" and consistently ending up where I didn't want to be. I tried three more controllers and the situation never cleared up.

Real realism

And that brings us to the most important topic of all--how your charges behave in the heat of com-

petition. Those of you brought up on a diet of EA SPORTS hockey will notice right off that POWERPLAY takes a far subtler approach. Speed bursts, for instance, may well instill your selected player with some mighty fast skates, but they won't force him to hit warp speed.

The same thing applies to just about every facet of the game. Collisions can be rough, often brutal enough to lay an unfortunate player out for a spell, but they won't send human missiles rocketing about the ice. Players hook, hold, and grapple in a constant flurry not unlike the NHL, and even shots and passes that seem a bit retarded at first begin to feel within the range of realistic human limitations the more you play.

Aside from an authentic pace, POWERPLAY is a wonderful judge of what should bulge the old twine and what should stay out. A good goal scorer left unchecked in the deep slot always stands a great chance, but wild melees with several defenders backchecking do not. Breakaways, rare though they are in this game (as they should be), often result in a goal, while "1 on 2" opportunities probably won't. That is, of course, unless the single offensive player happens to possess the shot of a John LeClair or the moves of a Saku Koivu.

As in the EA game, teams go through very definite hot and cold streaks, sometimes confined to a few fleeting minutes, sometimes lasting an entire contest. Thankfully, it feels less pre-ordained in this context. In NHL HOCKEY, for instance, a "team on the skids" will still generate a bevy of chances yet somehow fail to bury the biscuit—extremely frustrating. In POWERPLAY, a rough patch might be typified with some missed checks, off-the-mark shots, and the same sort of general malaise that would permeate a real-life cold streak.

When your team is flying, however, POWER-PLAY lets you pull off some truly skilled maneuvers beyond the regular advanced fare of faked shots, one-timers, dekes and the like. As the manual explains, deflections, hooking, double-tap dumpins and sliding blocks are all within the reach of a well-versed player with a 4-plus button gamepad.

And that brings me to something else I really like about POWERPLAY: the arrangement of



TV OR COMPUTER GAME? POWERPLAY 98 players usually move and position themselves exactly as they would in the NHL.



KABOOM Stevie Y lets a howitzer rip from the slot, as shown from the POWERPLAY 98 replay camera.

gamepad controls. You'll soon find you won't be able to slap the puck then mow down a couple of defenders all with the same button, simply because the game won't allow you to do it. This little development should effectively slow anyone who doesn't know his controls.

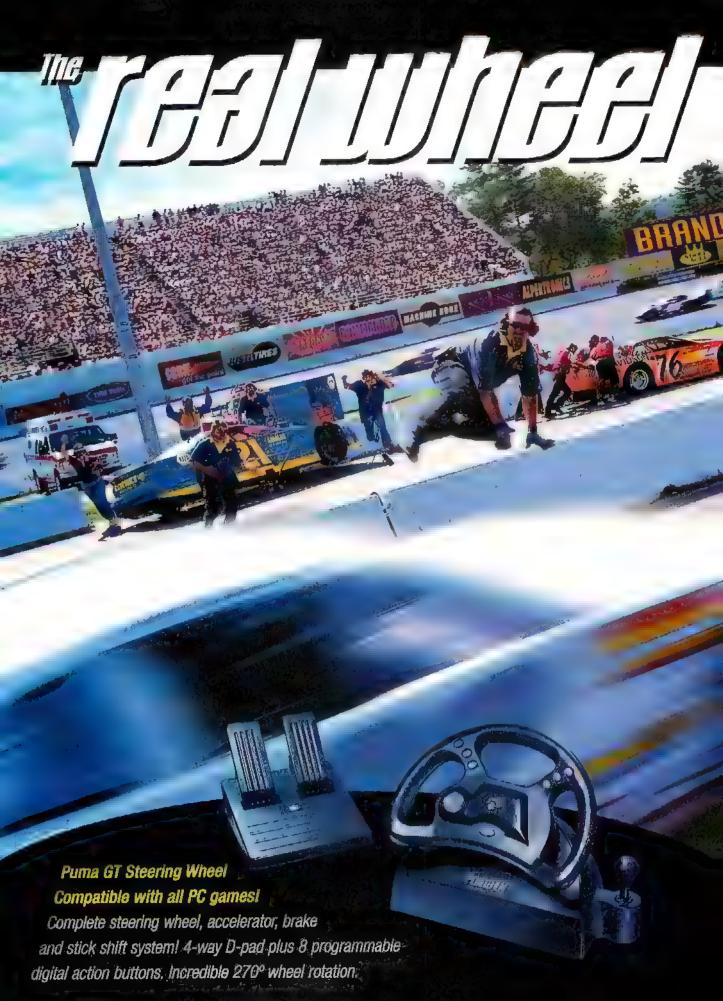
The gray lining on this silver cloud? Just a few things really, but enough to be at least slightly disconcerting. Pull your goalie and the CPU team will do their best to miss your net, perhaps taking a penalty instead. Dump the puck in from your own end and the CPU goalie may freeze it with absolutely nobody in the offensive zone. Get caught on a "2 on 0" and the CPU team will often

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APPEAL: Hockey afticionados who appreciate the subtleties of the real thing. NHL HOCKEY fans willing to put of with a bit less gravy for a bit more meat.

PROS: Superb artificial intelligence and team management component. Lots of gameplay options and a generally successful conversion from 2 to 3D.

CONS: Some minor Al inconsistencies, 3D quirks, and questionable player to rink scaling.



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completely squander their opportunity, perhaps going by the net entirely. To make matters worse, watching any of the above for a second time means dealing with the frightfully brief replay component, one that does not sport a save capability.

At The Buzzer

Nevertheless, the factors critical to long-term intrigue are present and accounted for. More simulation than game, NHL POWERPLAY is actually what it claims to be, namely "the most realistic hockey game ever created". I found that winning games was a bit too easy, and it is less a complete sensory "experience" than EA's NHL 98, but, then again, EA's been doing the hockey thing twice as long, haven't they?

MHL OR

\$49.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

Pentium 90, 16M8 RAM, Windows 95, 4X CD-ROM drive using 32-bit Windows 95 CD-ROM driver, Hi Color-capable 1 MB PCI video card with DirectDraw support, DirectX 5 (included on game CD), 30 MB hard disk space.

DESIGNER/PUBLISHER: EA Sports San Mateo , CA. 800-245-4525 www.easports.com

The beast is back.

EA Sports' swaggering NHL HOCKEY series has indeed returned for its annual rite of passage, and as usual it's a thing of wondrous beauty that no PC hockey player should ignore. Even better for serious hockey fans, EA has finally put the emphasis on upgraded artificial intelligence rather than the absolute latest in graphical wizardry.

It's no secret that AI has long been the Achilles heel of what otherwise has been one of the most amazing and complete PC sports experiences there is. Now, with Virgin Interactive's smart NHL POW-ERPLAY 98 descending on the marketplace, EA has made some moves in what would appear to be the right direction. Ain't competition grand?

I remember not so fondly the frustrating oddities of NHL HOCKEY in the past (to this day my garbage can harbors a grudge from one particularly savage beating), and am happy to report that several have been corrected. Breakaways, for starters, an all too common occurrence in earlier efforts, are much harder to get and much tougher to capitalize upon. Ditto for "one-timers," a phrase I swear was dreamed up by an EA designer in the first place. At one time practically the only way to score a goal, successful one-timers now take hard work, pinpoint timing and exacting precision. Yahoo.

Another hole EA has covered nicely is CPU team line changes. You can forget about taking advantage of those ill-timed and horribly slow changes that left the ice wide open for seconds at a time in NHL 97, simply because they don't do it that way anymore. Nor will Lindros and LeClair opt to hit the bench as they break in on a 2-on-0, another ridiculous state of affairs from last year's game.

The Fix Is In

Yet all is not perfect. I've said it before and I'll say it again until I'm done saying it, but the NHL HOCKEY series seems to go out of its way to see a given team wins a given game. Why? I just don't know, but it's obviously and quite purposely instilled in the heart of the program.

Granted, a given team will sometimes out-chance and out-shoot another on a given night and still fall victim to bad luck, bad karma, or whatever—and that's the way it should be. But when you pump more than quadruple the shots at the opposition net—in one case, 83-21—you should not lose 5-1. Ever. And players should not miss open nets from just outside the goal crease or score on weak backhanders from just inside the blueline in order to preserve what the program feels is right. But it happens in NHL 98, far more than real life good or bad luck would permit.

Otherwise, players generally head in the direction they should be heading and position themselves correctly. I said generally. At this stage in the game's development, there's no excuse for powerplay pointmen who refuse to pick up easy backpasses at the blueline. There's also no excuse for goalies venturing from their nets to corral cleared pucks before their defensemen get a chance at an icing call. And finally, there's no excuse for entire



RECOMMENDED VIEWING You're a bit farther from the action but get a much better read of the ice from one of NHL 98's overhead cameras.



HE SHOOTS, HE SCORES Despite pressure from Islanders Dman Kenny Jonsson, Sergel Federov puts one just inside the right post.

penalty killing units hugging in so close to their own net that they won't even venture into a corner to pick up a loose puck.

Chrome Job

EA hasn't confined their NHL 98 modifications strictly to gameplay. In keeping with previous installments, the revamped opening sequence is a thing of riveting enormity, and that's just the start. Up in the press box, real life Vancouver Canucks' play-by-play man Jim Hughson has been complemented with a color commentator, and their banter, though sometimes quite generic, certainly helps "sell" the game.

On the ice, NHL 98 is still the smoothest thing on blades, again mimicking a high-tech television broadcast. Player movement is truly spectacular

now, especially when compared to any other PC hockey game. This includes skaters who sport a seemingly infinite variety of maneuvers, not just between whistles but during play stoppages too, when they'll tap their sticks on the ice, test their shooting motions and mill about as real players do. Both audio and video can be a bit over the top at times, but EA can be forgiven for leaving realism behind when the results are this exciting.

Multiple cameras are again part of the package, as is the best replay component to grace any sports game. New for '98 are PIP displays of the penalty box as players get set to exit, disallowed goals attributed to crease violations, and a Coaching Strategies utility. Remember though, NHL 98 is first and foremost a test of reflexes and timing. Good coaching will take you only so far.

In a perfect world, the folks at EA Sports would join forces with the crowd from Radical, take the best from NHL 98 and NHL Powerplay '98, and concoct the perfect game. It really wouldn't take much because the pleces are already there. In the meantime however, and even though I've bestowed identical ratings to both, NHL 98 gets a marginal nod because nothing immerses you in the overall PC hockey show, and nothing is as flatout invigorating as this veteran performer

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APPEAL: Hockey afficionados who appreciate the subtleties of the real thing, NML HOCKEY fans willing to put of with a bit less gravy for a bit more meat.

PROS: Superb artificial intelligence and team management component. Lots of gameplay options and a generally successful conversion from 2 to 3D.

CONS: Some minor Al inconsistencies, 3D quirks, and questionable player to rink scaling.

NHL Open ice

\$22.55

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

Windows 95, DirectX enabled 75MHz Pentium, 8M8 RAM, 1MB PCI video card, 1X CD-ROM drive.

DESIGNER: Midway Games

PUBLISHER: GT Interactive New York, New York 800-469-5961 www.gtinteractive.com

Insanity On Ice

See funny man with big head. Ha ha. See other man. He do flip way up in air, This fun. Make me pee pants. It warm. Mmm...

Alright, so GT Interactive's NHL OPEN ICE isn't my cup of tea. But arcade-reared sports-loving kids are probably gonna eat this thing up because 1) it's got their hockey heroes performing outlandish maneuvers and, 2) it's an exacting replica of the coin-op beast. The rest of you? Well, you might find it a hoot too, for a few moments anyway.

But enough of the snide remarks. NHL OPEN ICE, curiously licensed by the same two professional hockey organizations who lent their name to the genre's more serious titles, isn't a simulation and wasn't meant to be. As a matter of fact, it's about as far removed from the National Hockey league as pro wrestling is from the Olympic variety.

From the stereotypically cheesy coin-op front end, players are taken through game setup screens where minimalist game options such as period length, "super" or "normal" goalies and difficulty levels are established. With cheerleaders urging them on, they'll also have a few seconds to enter in a power-up code or two. Then it's game time,

On the Ice, its mayhem all the way as your two skaters and goalie battle with computerized or human opposition. And if you've happened across certain codes beforehand or hit the right button combinations while playing, there's no telling what mutations or bizarro activities you might see. Tiny Teemu Selannes with mammoth heads, 12-foot tall Steve Yzermans with puny noggins, and



PIXEL FEST 2-on 2-in a grainy, chunky environment--the way hockey wasn't meant to be played.



HOCKEY GONE AMOK The sheer force of Jos Nieuwandyk's stick causes the puck to burst into flame, white Claude Lemieux gets 2 minutes for that enormous kisser.

pucks the size of goaltenders are just the start.

Think the real life Pavel Bure is deceptive? Yeah? Betcha he can't do a triple spin-o-rama 30 feet above ice level or launch a blast of such magnitude that both puck and net end up in flames. The fact that he can here doesn't seem so incredulous once you've been playing awhile, and neither do momentary yet stupefying boosts in speed, checking, shooting and puck-handling. Just make sure your "turbo meter" is cranked--you know, like Scotty Bowman did before he sent Shanahan onto the ice in last year's Cup final.

With four human players, each of you can take on a single on-ice persona and the game will admittedly get a tad exciting. Go ahead, embark on what is a nutso ride through the dark recesses of the minds of programmers gone mad. I double dares ya.

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APPEAL: Uh...sub-adults who feel hockey is but a bump on the road to zany wackiness. Children of the arcade and fans of power-up codes.

PROS: 4-player support, fast-paced action, ridiculous but nifty animations, relaxed system requirements and low pricing.

CON5: 3-man squads, virtually no rules, and ragged, low resolution 2D graphics. Anyone over the mental age of ten will find gameplay heavy on the pandemonium and horribly vapid in comparison to the Virgin or EA Sports titles.

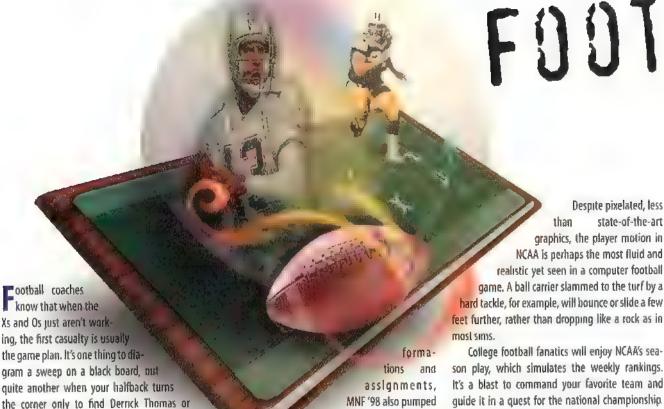






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Make all the predictions you want, but you can never really separate the games from the hype until the final versions are released. In CGW's first Sports Supplement (Nov 97) we previewed this season's crop of football games, offering best guess-timates on which titles would run to daylight and which would face fourth-and-long. How did we do against the spread?

Bryan Cox waiting to separate him from his chin

strap. The same principle applies to prognosticating

football sims.

Let's just say I won't be heading to Las Vegas any time soon. Seriously, though, with one major exception, our previews were fairly close to the mark. Hotly anticipated LEGENDS 98, our choice for second place, was the season's surprise flop, engendering a virulent reaction among gamers of the sort usually reserved for morning breath. Among other new releases, MADDEN 98 was not as good as expected, while MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL 98 rebounded from a mediocre rookie season to capture first place.



MNF98 achieved not only critical success, but emerged as the clear cut sim of choice among serious football gamers. Driven by a smooth play-calling interface that allows on-the-fly adjustments in

debut edition. The player sprites were twice as large this time around, much crisper looking, and displayed Jersey numbers. The crew at OT Sports obviously sent the game's artificial intelli-

gence back to school in the off season, as this year's computer opponent is much more challenging than the original. MNF 98 really shines in head-tohead play, with options for Internet, modem, serial, and

up the player graphics and

A.I. that hampered last year's

local two player action. Internet games are limited to coach-only mode, which is MNF 98's strength. Will my 3 wide receiver formation flood your zone? If I blitz will you burn me with a screen pass? Hardcore football choices like these drive every play in MNF 98, making it perhaps the most intense headto-head sports sim ever.



A surprising second place finisher was EA Sports' action-oriented college sim NCAA FOOTBALL. While MADDEN grabbed most of the preseason attention, when release time came along NCAA was the EA product that ultimately turned gamers' heads.

Despite pixelated, less state-of-the-art graphics, the player motion in NCAA is perhaps the most fluid and realistic yet seen in a computer football game. A ball carrier slammed to the turf by a hard tackle, for example, will bounce or slide a few feet further, rather than dropping like a rock as in

College football fanatics will enjoy NCAA's season play, which simulates the weekly rankings. It's a blast to command your favorite team and quide it in a quest for the national championship. NCAA provides officially licensed rights to 112 Division I-A schools and four major post-season bowl games.



On the down side, there's only one view, an elevated, behind-the-quarterback look that makes throwing to outside receivers an exercise in faith, since they can't be seen unless your QB rolls out to that side.

More disappointing is the lack of a planned career mode which would feature recruitment and graduation. Maybe next year.



The preview edition EA Sports privately screened at E3 last summer seemed to ensure MADDEN the top spot among this season's football sims. However, like a promising first round draft pick that never quite makes the grade, something happened to MADDEN 98 along the way.

What happened? It doesn't take Vince Lombardi to figure this one out. Consider that the game's release date was moved up from January to late October. When do games ever ship ahead of schedule? Why would that happen? And how do you get a game out the door three months early? Who made

CGW'S SPORTS COLUMNIST LOOKS BACK ATHS '97 FOOTBALL PREDICTIONS

that decision? The answers are, in order: never; Christmas shopping season; cut back on features; and marketing weenies.

by Dennis McCauley



So we're left with an undercooked MADDEN that's a good game, but not what it could have been. Still primarily an action-oriented title, MADDEN nevertheless is creeping into

sim territory with roster management features that include a rudimentary trading module. Unfortunately, the game's stats, once you locate them, still lag behind the presentation found in the hardcore sims. Gameplay-wise, certain gadget plays, such as the Hail Mary, succeed far too often to maintain any sense of true simulation. And numerous bugs serious hamper the action.

The bottom line on MADDEN 98 is that it's a hot property that was unfortunately pushed out the door before it was fully baked. EA Sports obviously knows this and is completing patches that address some of the key issues (at press time, a 3Dfx patch was nearing release). It's an enjoyable game, but it has a lot of warts.



As predicted, Sierra's FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL PRO 98 is essentially last year's game with a few cosmetic changes layered on. That's not necessarily a bad thing, since the '97 version was a prime-time player that copped a 4.5 star review in CGW. In fact, the entire FPS FOOTBALL series has been evolving incrementally over the last four years. This year, unfortunately, there's little substantive reason to recommend the game over its ancestors, especially since Sierra and developer Synergistics are known to be gearing up for a ground-up rebuilding of FRONT PAGE for '99.

So, what's new this time around? Keeping up with the Joneses (and the MADDENs), Sierra has added lackluster play-by-play commentary from



CBS Radio broadcaster Howard David. In the pointless eye candy department you'll find 3D renderings of all 30 NFL stadiums displayed briefly at the beginning of the game. But the in-

game views are just generic grey backdrops. The game interface has changed as well, making navigation marginally more intuitive than in past editions. Commissioners of the plentiful FPS online leagues will appreciate the ability to generate HTML output of league files.

If you don't own a previous edition in the series, by all means, grab this one. FPS '98 is a steal at its \$29.99 list price (Sierra's tacit admission that the game is just an upgrade), and it still includes all the great features that have made FRONT PAGE the decade's dominant gridiron simulation.

HEROES OF THE GRIDIRON Predicted Finish 5 Actual Finish 5

Since HEROES OF THE GRIDIRON is basically MNF '98 with college teams, it may surprise some that it ranks this low. However, while HEROES is a good stand-alone game, one can't help but have the feeling that it should have been just an MNF '98 mod-



ule. HEROES employs only 32 of the better-known college teams, and uses nostalgic rosters of past players. Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of the players seem to be from the 1970's and later,

apparently due to licensing difficulties with players who were not NFLPA members. The small number of teams and fairly recent run of players sadly detract from the game's sought after nostalgic feel. Fortunately, all of MNF's good points apply to Heroes, with the exception of the ABC TV atmosphere, which is super low-key in the college version. Can someone check Keith Jackson for a pulse?



One of last year's sleepers was Acclaim's NFL QUAR-TERBACK CLUB 97 and arcade sports gamers were hotly anticipating the sequel. Unfortunately the targeted release date in October came and went, and a contact at Acclaim recently informed CGW that the PC edition would not be released this year because it did not measure up to the Nintendo 64 version.



And then there's LEGENDS 98, probably the only sports game in history to lose to a vaporware title. Yes, LEGENDS is so bad you're better off with no game. And to add insult to injury, LEGENDS had the coolest concept of any sports game this year.

As an NFL junkie, I was completely ga-ga over



the chance to pit cross-era pro teams gainst one another. I imagined Emmitt Smith crashing helmets with Dick Butkus, and Sammy Baugh trying to throw the deep post against

Deion Sanders. Instead, what Accolade unleashed was a buggy game with meaningless player ratings, bad A.I., and rampant scoring.

Accolade needs to seriously question the design decisions that went into this game. The list is long and undistinguished, but here's just a few of the more vexing issues: How can you release a Win95 product with no mouse support? How is it that it was the season's only game without jersey numbers? How do you release a graphics-oriented sim into today's market with no 3D support? And finally, since it was scheduled for 1997, how can a game be this bad with an extra year of work? The larger question is, can Accolade recover from this disaster and regain the confidence of the average gamer?

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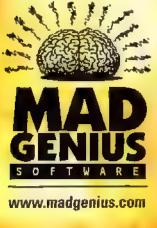
GUNMETAL's powerful 3-D engine renders incredibly complex and realistic environments: fog, underwater, indoors, outdoors, and in deep space. Interacive CD-quality music changes with your actions and environments.

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EA Sports' NBA LIVE 98

By Tasos Kairas

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

Windows 95, P100 (P166 recommended), 16MB RAM (32 recommended), 1MB highcolor capable PCI SVGA video card, 4x CD-ROM drive, 3D accelerator with 3dfx chipset recommended. For multiplayer: IPXcompatible network or 9600 bps modem.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: modem, network. or serial connection (2-8 players on 2 PCs. 1 CD per computer.)

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: EA Sports Redwood City, Calif. (800) 245-4525 www.easports.com

t's amazing that EA Sports' NBA LIVE franchise has been allowed to go four years without competi-

tion, especially when you consider how readily game publishers jump on the bandwagon

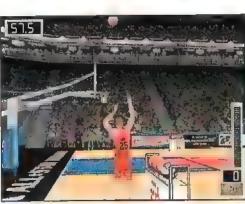
at the first sign of a successful title. Fortunately, NBA LIVE steadily improved from season to season, even without competition. But Sega's new NBA ACTION 98 is a surprise rookie, showing some good moves that even EA's veteran would be wise to learn.

Both games have terrific 3D engines, with texture-mapped players' faces and the like. But NBA LIVE 98, with its years alone in the marketplace, is still good enough to take on any newcomer,

even if NBA ACTION 98 gives

it a good game.

Like many computer gamers, I always hope for vast improvements in every sequel to my favorite game. As a fanatical sports gamer, that means I have huge expectations each season for all of my favorites. Now, I understand that it's a lot to ask for a developer to improve their



For a little All-Star Game fun, try your hand at the three-point shootout.

product in leaps and

bounds each year, especially if the game is already a pretty good one.

NBA LIVE 98 does not leap or even bound over last year's version, but there are a few features that I've been asking for a long time—and received.

First and foremost is the additional control options. Some of the welcome new moves you can make on offense are crossover dribble, a shoulder-lowering drive, and a pivot or spin move. When shooting, you can do a leaner or fadeaway by shooting while pushing the directional pad towards or away from the basket, and a hook shot by turning 90 degrees from the basket before you shoot. There's also a direct pass option that let's you pass directly to any player, and a direct shoot button that lets you decide what kind of shot to take from a choice of four, including a high-flying dunk or an easy layup.

The best part of the new controls might be what you can now do on defense. There's a button for stealing and one for hand-checking, so you can control what the player does when he's playing the ballhandler closely

Continued on page 196a



Fadeaways and leaners were added this year for more shot versatility.

TOUT

Takes On Sega's NBA ACTION 98

NBA Action 98

50.00

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Windows 95, P90, 16MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, SVGA graphics with 8-bit color, Sound Blaster 16 or compatible card.

MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: hot seat (2-5 players on one computer)

DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts

PUBLISHER: Sega Entertainment Redwood City, Calif. (888) sega-sales www.sega.com



Even though NBA LIVE is a great game, there's nothing wrong with a little healthy competition. And besides, all Sega's development

team really had to do was look at NBA LIVE, an already successful product, and imitate the good and improve the bad. But that's easier said than done.

If you are already familiar with NBA LIVE you will find your way around NBA ACTION with little difficulty. Although the front-end interface design is less polished and glitzy than EA's multimedia extravaganza, it is functional and easy to use nevertheless.

What's surprising about NBA ACTION is how well the 3D polygonal players are rendered and animated for an inaugural release. They almost look and move as good as they do in NBA LIVE, a title with a few more years to work out the kinks in their men, it's all there: the texture-mapped faces, sharp uniform details, realistic height and girth, and so on. There's still a little work to be done to get their feet planted firmly on the hardwood, however, as players

sometimes seem to float through their surroundings—a problem that often plagues 3D games,

There's also the problem of speed consistency, It seems to take

too long for a player to set up for a shor, especially dunks, and usually gives the defense enough time to collapse on the player to block his shot. For instance, to prepare for a mean dunk, the player squats down for added spring and then leaps in the air, which, admittedly, is more realistic than just jumping straight up. The problem is it takes him too long to get through the whole routine. The same applies to jump shots if the player is not already square to the basket—he takes a step or two to get set, then shoots.

The speed of the game needs some adjusting too. Even if your machine can

maintain a decent frame rate with some of the graphics turned down, the speed of the game itself might be too slow, though you can adjust it slightly. My P133 gives me a decent frame rate with the game set at 640x480 with 8-bit color, but in contrast to it running at 320x240, it's a bit too slow and loses some excitement. The same also seems to affect the game clock, as a twelve-minute

Continued on page 196b



A limited menu pops up from the court to let you change plays in the middle of the action.



Although the graphics are a good rookie attempt, they don't match up well against NBA Live 98.

Continued from page 194

(previously, the defender would automatically swat at the ball when he was close enough, resulting in unwanted fouls). There's even a direct switch option that, like direct pass, let's you switch to a specific player on your team. But the best thing of all is that you can now face up the player you're guarding: When you hold down this button, your player sets up in a proper defensive stance and always faces the player your defending no matter which way you move. He'll side-step laterally and backpedal to cut off the ballhan-



Set plays to any of eight buttons, then call them from the court.



APPEAL: Action-oriented PC sports fans looking for the latest and greatest.

PROS: Improved player controls, deeper coaching and strategy options, stunning graphics.

CONS: Still some unbalanced play, 3dfx board required for highest graphics settings.

dler, preventing him from driving to the basket.

Balancing Act

The offense in NBA LIVE 98 still has an unmistakable advantage over the defense, as it always has, and the unusually high scores reflect that. The reason for this is two-fold. On the one hand, it's still really difficult to block a shot or even cause an opponent to miss, or to steal the ball. Many computer teams shoot the lights out at the higher difficulty levels, while your team goes cold at the other end. Which leads to the next problem: the disparity among the difficulty settings. The rookie level is too easy offensively, as you can sink just about everything you throw up, most of which are dunks, while any difficulty level higher than that means the same for your opponent, while your seven-foot center sometimes misses easy put-backs. There needs to be a setting where both teams play at even keel.

One way to balance the scales a little is to bump up the frequency of defensive fouls a bit, but you'll also have to play defense more cautiously to avoid the wrath of the whistle-happy referees.

At The Buzzer

Although it perpetuates the series' lingering problem of court awareness by computer-controlled players—who step out of bounds needlessly, shoot from behind the backboard, or get called for three-seconds in the key—NBA LIVE 98 continues to improve on an already solid game. With more coaching and strategy options (you can assign a play to all of the buttons on the gamepad and call them from on the court), it's now a deeper game—but it could still get a few pointers from NBA ACTION 98.

Continued from page 195 quarter goes by unusually slow.

Slower court play is made even duller by the play-by-play announcing by Chick Hearn—he sounds like those announcers of old, calling a game circa 1950 or '60. He gets excited sometimes, but doesn't add the extra exclamations you might expect from a NBA game, especially a computer one.

Play Calling

Off the court, NBA ACTION contains an Interesting array of coaching strategies and features. A number of



You can only assign three plays to your gamepad (or keyboard); the other two are unchangeable.



APPEAL: PC basketball fans looking for more control, accuracy than NBA Live.

PROS: Excellent player controls, relatively low system requirements, deep coaching options, good graphics.

CONS: Game speed problems, duli play-byplay, ilmited multiplayer support.

slide bars are used to adjust tempo and crash boards on offense. You can assign plays to three buttons, with two more—alley oop and double team—that can't be changed. On defense, you can also pick one opposing player to double team. All of these settings can be combined into one of three sets that can be called from the court, glving you a lot of combinations to try.

Like NBA LIVE, there is a faceup button on defense (called a step modifier), which doesn't work as well since the defender doesn't stay facing his man. That means you have to let up on the step modifier a lot to correct the direction he's facing. There's also no illegal defense call whatsoever.

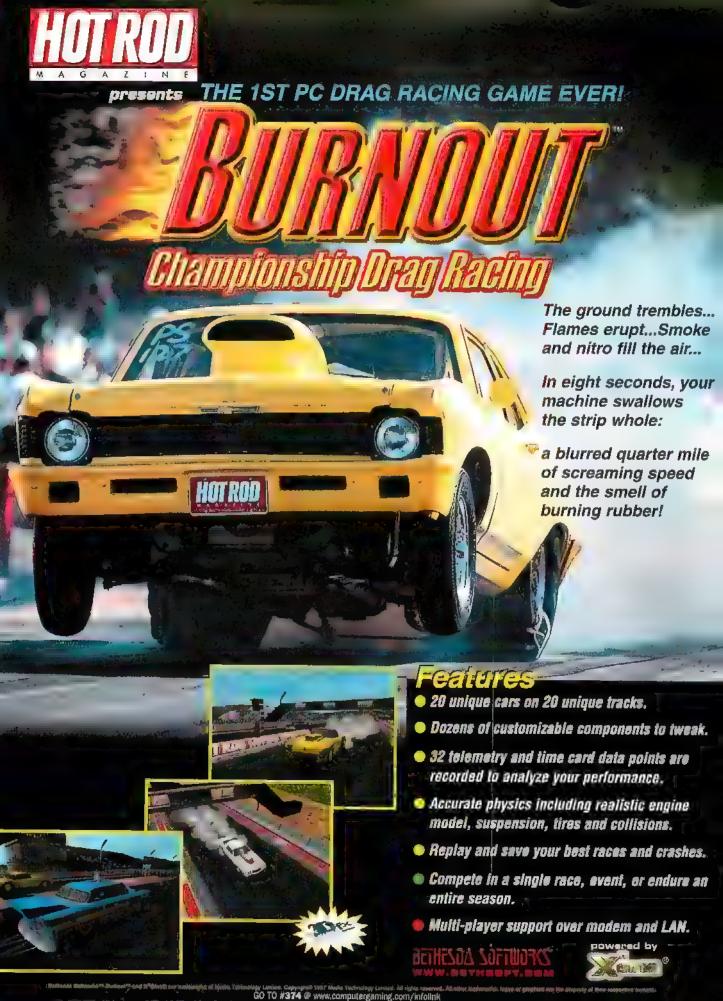
But playing defense in NBA ACTION is better in many ways than in NBA LIVE. You really have to work to get an open shot or you'll get rejected. Although it might be a bit too easy to block a shot in NBA ACTION, at least you can do it with dependable regularity. And you'll have to be extra careful about getting your own shots blocked—the shooting animation doesn't end when the ball is released. It will take your man a second or two to recover from taking a shot before he can go after his own loose ball after the block.

Finally, NBA ACTION has the distinct advantage of being far easier on system requirements than NBA LIVE, making it a better choice for those who haven't upgraded their rig to the latest and greatest Pentium with 3D acceleration—a must for getting the full enjoyment out of EA's title.

Final Score

NBA ACTION 98 is a solid and promising contender that should enjoy a good rookie season, but it's going to have to do a little tweaking and adjusting to its game to play at the same level as NBA LIVE. Watch for this player next year, but for now, the veteran is still the one to beat.





GAME	PUBLISHER	REVIEW	RATING	SUMMARY
Baseball		1		
Baseball Mogul	Infinite Monkey Systems	Nov 97	***	Very good, unique, clever baseball GM sim.
Diamond Mind	Diamond Mind	Dec. 97	#####	Statistically accurate text-based baseball sim. Good for stat-heads but graphically dated.
FPS: Baseball 98	Sierra	Oct. 97	AA INGS	Better than last year's catastrophe, but this still has a long way to go.
Grand Siam	Virgin Interactive	Oct. 97	建建筑设施	Looks and feels like a bad console game. Awkward interface, weak stats and trade Al.
Triple Play 98	EA Sports	Sept. 97	pining pi	Entertaining 3D arcade action, but light on sta- tistical accuracy.
Tony La Russa 4	Maxis Sports	Oct 97	**********	Disastrous step backward for one of the great PC baseball sims. Stick with Tony 3.
(Enothall		1	1	
ABC's Mondey Night Football '98	OT Sports	Dec 97	siririni.	Second season of this newbie football sim turns out to be a winner, with better AI, graphics.
Legends Football '98	Accolade	Dec 97	ANDRO	By far the year's biggest disappointment. A failed attempt at cross-era football action.
Basketball		1	1	I and the second state of a second se
NCAA Basketball Final Four 97	Mindscape	July 97	**************************************	Mediocre college hoops with dated graphics, limited options, and confused layout.
Golf		! Cast 07	i propositivi i	Superb graphics and interface; good multiplay-
FPS: Golf	Sierra	Sept 97	PEDEDEDATE	er options. TrueSwing is good alternative to swing meter.
British Open Championship Golf	Looking Glass	Aug 97	Acetekoloric 	Realistic and intelligent golf action, but difficult mechanics and no multiplayer.
Links LS 1998	Access Software	Nov 97	***	World's best golf sim gets better, with quicker screen redraws and internet play.
PGA Tour Pro	EA Sports	Oct 97	anaba	Good update of a good series, with multiple courses and great multiplayer options.
Racing X-Car. Experimental Racing	Bethesda Softworks	Dec 97	a de de de de	Deep, intense driving sim that's marred only by being too difficult at times.
Soccer Kickoff 97	Maxis Sports	Oct 97	्रे क्रिक्ट क्री क्रीड है। क्रिक्ट क्रीड क्रीड है।	First U.S. version of ANCO's soccer sim is the best of the class, with great gameplay and challenging Al.
Misc. Tennis Elbow	GOTO Software	Nov 97	nanan	Decent tennis simulation, not groundbreaking, but good enough for die-hards.

Cover photo (page 179) by Andy Hayt courtesy of Sega Entertainment, Special thanks to Eddia Lee (art direction/design) and Ruth Liebman (design/production) of Two Design, San Francisco, CA for their hard work on this feature.



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ONKA, DEEP BLUE AMONG THOSE VYING FOR FIRST SEASON CROWN

econd PGL Season Signups Now Taking Place on WWW.PGL.NET web site

At 18, TonkA (aka ridget Fitzgerald), has a t on her mind—and her ands. Qualifying for the augural season of the 3L hasn't been easy for ne of the leading ladies Quake". Connecting nd playing from the dorltory at the prestigious illiard School, where e majors in viola, was accomplishment in elf.

"If I'm lucky enough win any money playing the PGL, I'd probably e it toward a new viola, hough an ISDN or T1 e would be my second oice," she laughs.

ToNkA is just one of e many competing for e Quake crown in the st season of the AMD ofessional Gamers' ague. As of November th, Azraeii3 led the alifying rounds, tscoring the kill-crazy k through an uncanny ility to survive, and a werful Kill-Per-Minute io of 2.03.

Fast-twitch gaming 't for everyone; some e to think as well as oot. David Magro, aka

DeepBlue, is one such gamer. Known as one of the premier strategists of Westwood Studio's Command & Conquer*: Red Alert*, DeepBlue is competing to qualify for Command Conquer®: Red Alert™ finals in the PGL's first

games have you blasting away at your opponent. Command & Conquer®: Red Alert™ requires a lot more thought than that," noted Magro.

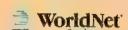
Offering more than \$250,000 in cash and prizes to winners in its first year, the AMD PGL

has attracted thousands of the world's best gamers, and hordes of spectators online and on TV (see story below.)

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har aboutous





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PGL STANDINGS AS OF NOVEMBER 20, 1997

	AKE ik/Name	Score	Kills	Deaths	Sui.	Avg%	КРМ	Play Time
1.	Azrael13	1948	2408	264	26	90%	2.03	19:45
2.	frick	1922	3735	858	112	81%	1.90	32:44
3.	graphik	1910	1680	206	28	89%	1.89	14:50
4.	cabalist	1884	2155	521	70	80%	1.31	27:20
5.	Rept-POST	1874	934	171	20	84%	1.78	08:45
6.	82	1853	656	157	11	80%	1.74	06:17
7.	dmann	1820	1495	546	70	73%	2.00	12:29
8.	JenBUNNY	1818	1377	462	29	74%	1.70	13:29
9.	Rykov	1808	1562	692	68	69%	1.37	19:00
10.	Razacla	1808	1360	481	50	73%	1.66	13:39

13:39

COMMAND & CONOUER®: RED ALERT®

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Rank/Name	Score	Allied (W/L)	Soviet (W/L)	Total (W/L)	Avg.				
1. BJ2	1951	14/1	33/3	47/4	92%				
z. SOLJA	1880	57/19	42/14	99/33	75%				
Havoc3	1856	55/19	32/16	87/35	71%				
4. N-sane	1846	10/3	55/15	65/18	78%				
5. Hoggleford	1842	0/0	96/40	96/40	70%				
6. unabombers	1841	3/3	47/13	50/16	75%				
7. xGODx	1839	3/5	61/25	64/30	68%				
8. push	1828	29/6	69/18	98/24	80%				
g. shooter1	1825	51/5	6/0	57/5	91%				
10.MOBBIN	1806	0/0	21/3	21/3	87%				
	-500	0,0	21/3	21/3	0/76				

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in The PGL and You Could See Yourself on TVI

ginning in mid-December, the AMD PGL will be featured bi-weekly on the nationally syndicated teleion show TV.COM. TV.COM is the #1 show dedicated to computers and the Internet produced by RET and distributed by IMG's TWI division. Check out www.pgl.net for your local station and air times.



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Aces Low

This Sabre Needs Sharpening



BRIDGE OUT The need to arm specific weapons and adjust sights for ground-attack runs may seem like busywork to some, but it captures some of the atmosphere of the cockpit-as-workplace.

by Robin G. Kim

n air combat — real or simulated — there's no kill like a gun kill. Why is it, then, that the Korean War era, which showcased some of the hottest missile-deprived gunfighters ever to see combat, has been almost totally neglected by sim developers? Whatever the reason, newcomer Eagle Interactive has — at last — filled this mysterious void with SABBU ACE: CONFLICT OVER KOREA.

At first glance, SABRE ACE seems to have all the makings of a real winner. It has a novel setting, you can fly several plane types on either side, the aircraft renderings are gorgeous, and it supports just about every 3D accelerator card known to man. Alas, the game's promise does not hold up quite so well under closer examination. While its strong points demonstrate how much gaming potential exists in this era, spotty execution in key areas denies SABRE ACE any chance of becoming a flight sim classic

FROM PROPS TO JETS

Play options include instant action, customizable doglights with up to four planes per side, multiplayer doglights. Imming missions, and a career mode. A career plays out as a series of nidependent canned missions: There are 25 if you choose to fight for the USAF in support of South Korea, or 20 if you fly as a USSR pilot unofficially aiding the North Koreans. Americans start ont with an Fa-51 Mustang, with an eventual transition to the F-80 Shooting Star, then finish out the war in the hotrod F-86 Sabre Soviet pilots begin similarly with a Yak-9 propdriven fighter, then graduate to the Sabre's legendary opponent, the MiC-15. The prospect of upcoming aircraft upgrades provides plenty of motivation to progress through the missions, and the added variety of planes helps keep gameplay fresh

Missions aren't dynamically generated, but they are interesting and diverse, with a good mix of realistic ar to air and air-to-ground assignments. Each sortic is preceded by a briefing, which is accessed through a chinky, but atmospheric, interface. Even details such as ALM (automatic direction finder) beacons, divert atrifickly, and safe bailout zones are covered, but the flight plan is carved in

stone-no changes are allowed

Most of the game's flights include some amount of peripheral air activity, but they still suffer from a somewhat sterile feel. This may be historically accurate, however, and occasional surprises, such as wingmen who turn back because of engine trouble or distress calls from besieged allies serve to liven things up. Both time compression and an option to jump to the next stage of the mission are provided for those who prefer to skip over the boning parts. Curiously, there is no corresponding way to avoid having to land at the end of a flight (unless you bail out) and still progress to the next mission in the sequence.

Up to seven wingmen can accompany you on every flight. Since you don't lead most missions, this gives plenty of opportunities to practice formation flying (or to use the special formation autopilot). Appropriately timed digitized radio chatter lends the sint some welcome atmosphere; the terse, rapid-fire acknowledgments of wingmen checking in are particularly well done. The few wingman commands you have available when you are leading a section are not very effective, but it is still wise to stick close to your brethren so they can distinct bandits you want to attack or clude.

STRANGE BREW

SABRE ACE's flight modeling is a bizarre mix of realistic and areadelike elements. One almost gets a sense that



SPLASH ONE MIG You will dominate the skies once you graduate to the F-86 Sabre (on the USAF side)



the design resulted from a pitched battle between realism nuts and action-game fans. The planes have a pleasantly fluid feel, with suitably mushy low-speed handling, and do bleed airspeed in turns, but the program artificially limits control inputs to prevent stalls. All aircraft are overpowered in climbs and can maintain ndiculously steep pitch angles indefinitely. Prop fighters demonstrate no torque effects, though lift is appropriately enhanced at higher throttle settings. Turn performance is fairly accurate for them, but becomes unrealistically good once you get to fly the F-86 or MiC-15. This problem is exacerbated by the absence of blackout/redout modeling.

Casual gamers will not mind these deviations from reality, of course, and even serious simmers might find the furballs satisfactory if they refrain from exploiting loopholes in the flight model. What casual gamers may have a problem with is the sun's difficulty, which cannot be adjusted. The Al pilots vary widely in skill. While the dumber ones are easy marks, the aces can give even experienced sim vets headaches. Kills are especially hard to come by in the later prop-fighter missions, when most of your opponents are flying vasily superior jets. Fortunately, evasion and escape is usually an option. Also, you need not succeed at a mission to proceed to the next,

NO JOY

Part of what makes dogfights in SABRE ACE so tough is the sim's awful cockoit



FORMATION TAKEOFF There's more emphasis on formation flying in this game than in your typical sim.

view system. Only 10 fixed-view directions are provided, plus a GCI tracking mode that automatically snaps between the 10 in an attempt to keep a selected target in sight. "Attempt" is the operative word here—there are large gaps between views that should rightfully overlap. An enormous blind spot also exists upward to the sides and rear. Combining the GCI view with peeks at the target information displayed on the dash is workable once you have learned some of the AB behavior patterns; until then, prepare to be frustrated. Blind spots also make finding targets annoyingly difficult

Except for some slumning aircraft renderings, the visuals are prelly, not jaw-dropping. Cround detail is coarse except near cities, yielding a poor sense of your height above ground. However, visibility limits are high, and SABRE ACE.

bousts unpressively fast frame rates with full terrain texturing—if you have a 3D video accelerator card, that is. Non-accelerated graphics are too choppy to be playable on an average Penthum unless you turn the detail all the way down. Even the accelerated graphics can bog down when the view fills with too many aircraft or flak bursts. Be warned that a few buyers have encountered installation problems on systems equipped with 3D cards.

SABRE ACE shows much promise, but is ultimately flawed. Even if you can accept the flight-model simplifications, the game's otherwise immersive gameplay is still marred by its deficient, playability-sapping cockpit view system. This may be the best Korean War sim released in many years, but right now, that's not saying much. §

Back in Senno

itkeugh Sasar Ace's combat training missions are nothing special, the extensive takeeth landing, and routine mavigation tulerials are exceptionally well done. You get to fly real trainer aimcraft: the T-6 and Yak-18, respectively, for USAF and USSR primary training. The T-33 or Min-18UTi follow only after you have mastered the prop trainer and are decimed roudy to strap on a jet.

The virtual flight instructor who talks you through the inssent watches you like a hawk, monitoring and critiquing everything; you speed, altitude, heading, even the direction you are looking (he gets really annuyed when you turn around to look at him in the back seat). If the instructor thinks the plane is about to crash, he will scole you as he takes back the centrels. Fighting for centrel of the plane at that point will only get you more werhal grief. This interactivity makes the training immersive and fun—even humorous at times—as well as effective. Though you flood have to work through it, training is a fighting of the game.

PAPPEAL: Anyone who has been anxiously waiting for someone to release a Korean War sim; experienced sim fans willing to overlook flight-model inaccuracies; novices seeking an accessible, yet challenging, first sim.

PROS: Outstanding flight-training segment; high 30-accelerated frame rates; beautiful aircraft graphics; good atmosphere; Korean War setting.

COMS: Limited number of canned missions and no mission builder: terri-

ble view system; simplified flight model; poor performance without a 3D card; no multiglayer chat; may be too difficult for novices.





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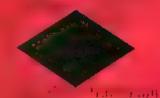
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Two Too Many

NovaLogic Takes Another Shot ... and Tanks

by Patrick C. Miller

o we really need a sequel to NovaLogie's ARMORED Pist? Three years ago, many gamers were turned off by its blotchy graphics and lack of realism. While ARMORED FIST 2 sports better graphics, sound, and multiplayer capabilities than its predecessor, It's still an action game dressed up as a sim.

ARMORED FIST 2 puts players in the role of a U.S. Marine Corps tank commankler participating in United Nations peacekeeping efforts in various hotspots around the world. You begin your career at the Marine training center at 29 Palms, California, where tutorial missions provide basic combat training. There are four campaigns of mereasing complexity, with eight scenarios per campaign. Missions take place in Africa, the former Soviet Union, and the Middle East. The missions can be played in any order. Results don't carry over from one mission to the next, but statistics are kept on your tank commander's cureer.

Although ARMORED FIST 2 is a DOS game, it installs easily and can be played under Windows 95 'The manual adequately covers the game's mechanics, but provides no information on vehicles or weapons in the game - other than the MtA2, and even that is minimal. A keyboard command overlay and quick-reference card are provided.

DRIVE YOURSELF CRAZY The only way you can back up your tank is to drive it yourself



AA ABRAMS In Armoneo Fist 2, the M1A2 tank is one nasty antiaircraft platform, capable of easily shooting down helicopters and attack aircraft with armor-piercing ammo from its main gun

ALL BUTTONED UP

You control each tank through a combination of joystick and keyboard commands, and you can choose from four stations: tank commander buttoned (known in the MIA2 as the commander's independent thermal viewer, or CITV), tank commander unbuttoned, gunner, and driver. There are also four external views and a map screen portraying the MIA2's intervehicular information system (IVIS). From this screen, you can maneuver units under your command by assigning waypoints. You can also

issue orders to units within your platoon, instructing them to change formation, spacing, and, to a limited extent, targeting priorities

Weapons available in the MIA2 are the 120mm gun, the 7 62mm coaxial machine gun, and the .50caliber machine gun on the turret's top. The main gun fires Sabot (arroor-piereing), HEAT (high-explosive, antitank) and STAFF (smart target-activated fire-and-forget)

rounds. Depending on the mission, you can call on A-10 ground-attack arcraft, AH-64 Apache helicopters, and rocket artillery for additional support. M2 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles tag along on some missions. Opponents include T-72 and T-80 tanks, BMP infantry fighting vehicles, BRDM armored cars, Tanguska antiaircraft vehicles, Mr-24 Hind gunships and Su-25 Frogfoot ground-attack alreraft.

STEEL OFF TARGET

When it comes to realism in firstperson simulations, I'm no fanatic. I can overlook quite a bit as long as the game at least feels somewhat real. But with ARMORED FIST 2, my credulity is stretched beyond its limits. From the commander's station, I can order my tank to speed up, slow down, and stop, but I can't order it to back up. I can shoot down helicopters and jets with armor-piereing rounds from the 120mm gun

Attack helicopters-both friendly and enemy-fly directly into enemy positions and are usually quickly shot down. Artillery is called in from the gunner's



Price: \$44.95 Minimum System Requirements: Pentum 120 Windows 95 a DOS 16MB PAM SVGA graptics, 4x CD ROM supports 1 John NAOT DYSTOKE and a Sound Baston compatible scale cards Mulliplayer Support:

Mode n or sedal connection 2 players) LAN o internet (2/8 Jayl S)

Designer: Sherwood "Kent" Simon Publisher: NovaLogic Calabasas CA ,8.8₁ 878 0325 www.novalogic.com



COMMANDING VIEW Hammering away at aircraft and lightly armored vehicles is satisfying with the .50-caliber machine gun. Too bad it becomes nearly worthless when full reafism is used,

station simply by pointing the gun at the target area. And where the heek is the infantry? Basic tactics such as fighting from hull-down positions aren't even part of ARMORFD FIST 2. Standoff-attacks with long-range antitank guided missiles are nonexistent.

One of the most annoying aspects of the original ARMORED FIST was the autolock targeting system that often made it difficult for you to shoot at the greatest threat, because target selection control was taken out of your hands. Autolock targeting remains in ARMORED FIST 2, but it's better implemented. And this time, NovaLogic didn't make the mistake of leaving out a more realistic guinery model for those who want to do their own shooting.

SIGHT SEEING

By choosing the realistic play option and leaving autolock targeting turned off, you can acquire turgets on your own through the gunner's primary sight. Successfully painting the target with the laser rangefinder will automatically make gun bar-

rel adjustments for the ammo type that you load. After that, just squeeze the trigger and fire. If the round misses, make adjustments until a hit is scored. Unfortunately, poor design decisions add needless complexity to manual gunnery, ruining this aspect of the game.

Although I eventually became proficient at manual gamery, I found that as I played more complex scenarios in which my tank had to rapidly engage multiple targets, I needed to turn the autolock feature back on. Manual targeting was too slow and too unwickly. Playing from the driver's position with the autolock option enabled is the best way to win the more difficult missions. But most armor-sim fans would prefer to spend their time shooting the 120 mm gun than driving.

TURKEY IN YOUR TANK

The game severely lucks in the Al department. Some units are totally passive as you pick them off one by one, while others act as if they're intent on ramming your tank. Mission complexity and difficulty is achieved by adding more and more enemy units to destroy while forcing you to control more and more brainless friendly units. I also experienced problems with game crashes and an apparent bug that causes units to become confused by their way-point orders.

Anyone hoping that ARMORED FIST 2 might be a worthy successor to MI TANK PLATOON, the MicroProse classic released back in 1989, will be disappointed. The good news for armor fans is that tank simulations, which bave been neglected by game publishers for years, are suddenly in style. At least there's hope that a new tank-simu champion will emerge in the near future. §

PAPPEAL: Gamers who are looking for an unrealistic, but easy-to-play tank simulation.

PROS: Rolling terrain; great sound

effects; multiplayer capability.

CONS:

Clueless Al; utter lack of realism; crash problems; limited replay value.



A View of Two Abrams:

Armored Fist 2 vs. iM1A2 Abrams

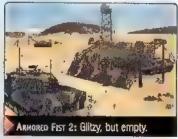
ovaLogic's Armoreo Fist 2 joins Interactive Magic's .M1A2 Armores as the second tank sim on the market featuring the US Army's M1A2 battle tank. How do the two games stack up against each other?

For pure glitz through the use of graphics, music, sound effects, and full-motion video, Asmosto Fist 2 is the handsdown winner. But for those who want a more realistic experience without the requirement of a speedy, RAM-crammed

MMX Pentium,
M1A2 Is the

The gunnery model of (M1A2 is far more accurate than that in Armoreo Fist 2. Real-

world factics actually work, And although iM1A2's Al Isn't the greatest, it makes the Al in ARMORED FIST 2 look pathetic. M1A2 includes



dynamic campaigns, infantry, and greater unit variety, and it handles air and artillery support far better.

ARMORED FIST 2's strength lies in its ease of play and terrain modeling. Surprisingly, IT ked ARMORED FIST 2's commander's station better than M1A2's, because it was easier to spot and designate targets for my gunner. ARMORED FIST 2 is for gamers who want to jump into an Abrams and drive around the battlefield admiring the pyrotechnics they create.



At just over 1,500 miles per nour, the Loudest sound in the cockpit is your heartbeat.











IMAGINE SCREAMING THROUGH THE WIND LIKE A RAZOR, SAVAGE THUNDER IN YOUR VEINS, BITTER LIGHTNING AT YOUR FINGERTIPS, JUST STRAP YOURSELF INTO JAME'S F-15, THE MOST AUTHENTIC COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATION EVER. WITH FLIGHT MODELS BASED ON AUTUAL USAF DATA, IT'S AN OBSESSIVE LEVEL OF ACCURACY THAT ONLY THE MILITARY EXPERTISE OF JAME'S CAN ACHIEVE, DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE BUTTERFLIES IN YOUR STOWACH, WHEN YOU HIT MAGI 2,

THEY'LL BE CRUSHED.



We Byico Sins By the Book !!



The Plot Thickens



What This Sim Lacks in Flash and Dazzle It Makes Up For in Storyline

by Thierry Nguyen

evelopments in the space sun geure have seemed more focused on looks and movies than on innovation The Darkgleht CONFLICT had a very pretty engine that was attached to a very mediocre game. X-Wing vs. TIE FIGHTER was heavy on

the eye-candy, but light on the game-quality. And WING COMMANDER IV was more movie than game. FORGED ALLIANCE has the apposite problem. It has quite good gameplay, but dated graphics. However, if you've been aching for a space experience that's not devoid of storyline, you might want to overlook FORCED ALLIANCE's plain appearance.

SPACE TRUST

FORCED ALLIANCE starts

out as a simple, straightforward "Us versus Them" type of space war, but things get a bit more complicated as the game progresses. In the beginning, there are only three sides. Humans, the enemy Voraptoid, and the neutral Marauders. But as the game goes on, more races are thrown into the mix and the plot shifts so that you don't know who your friends really are - some enemies could turn out to be your staunchest allies.

Your decisions and actions help determine how the story flows. Many times, you will be given dialog choices that will determine your options, and other times your actions in combat will determine what happens next, Even when you start the game at the lowly rank of pilot, there are missions that affect your interalien relationships. One overarching plot will always play out, but your actions can alter the alliances

between the Humans and the various races. In one string of missions, I flew as a pilot for the human forces; when I replayed those particular missions, I allowed myself to be captured by the enemy and flew as a P.O.W. The basic mission goals stayed the same, but the missions were different simply because of perspective.



RETRO ROCKETS Despite 3D acceleration, the space-combat graphics in FORCED ALLIANCE have a decidedly early-'90s feel.

Later, when you are promoted to commander or captain, you have a more direct impact on the game's flow. As a commander, you will be consulted on important decisions, such as with whom to ally and which missions to accept; as a captain you will make the actual decisions. There is one "best" ending, but to reach it will require that you know how to properly handle each race

Because you can ally with the different factions, there are certain points in the game in which you fly their ships. Each race's ships handle differently, and each features one unique ability. Some of the races have two ship types, but the difference within those two ships is negligible

Combat is quite good, as the enemy Al will properly use the each ship's advantages. One aspect of combat you might find frustrating is that only one

race can counteraffack against missiles, while everyone else has to dodge them by sight. Orbital is supposedly developing a patch that will let all slops counteract missiles.

GRAPHICS SCHMAPHICS

The main drawback of this game is its lackluster graphics. Even when using

3Dfx-acceleration, the graphics engine reminds me more of STAR RANGERS and STAR CRUSADER than of anything that came out within the past year Hardware makes slight adjustments to the texlures on the ships, gets nd of pixelation, and boosts the faune-rute.

For those of you who were disappointed with the lack of singleplayer in X-Wing vs TIE FIGHTER wanted more influence in the story than WING COM-

MANDER IV, and can bear with the dated graphics and lack of multiplayer games, FORCED ALLIANCE is a good buy, I hope that PORCED ALLIANCE is a sign that meaty single-player campaigns and stories are returning to space sims. %

▶APPEAL: Space-simmers who value interesting single-player campaigns and control of their character's destiny over flashy graphics.

PROS: Excellent single-player campaign; variety of ships with unique handling; complex branching storyline.

▶CONS: Dated graphics, even with hardware acceleration; ship variety cries out for multiplayer support.





Price: \$29.95 Minimum System Requirements: 486DX 100 or better 16MB HAM Windows 95 40MB hard-drive space 2x CD-ROM, VGA graph cs card. Windows 95 compatible sound cards Multiplayer Support:

Designer: Orbital Studios Publisher: Buser I Games

Sania Cara C/ .888, 797 J86; www.ripcordgames.com



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(in Date shows a second shows and

"It is the sleekest, most beautiful, most criminally addictive wargame since, well, since the original, it should be a sensational hit, and it deserves to be."

-PG Gamun, Entron's Chaice

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD, FIVE-STAR REVIEW

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PANZER GENERAL® II. More than a sequel An entire generation beyond anything yet seen in strategy games. And seeing is believing. Witness the Living BATTLERIED a new standard for strategy game antwork. Thinty painstakingly a fried battlefields that are faithful to the real ones of WWIII of course, this beauty goes beyond skin deep. The phenomenal game play of the second generation Panzer Graphwagame.

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Bloody Good Time



This Is Not Your Kid's Real-time Strategy Game

by Greg Fortune

ungle's latest game, MYITE THE FALLEN LORDS, is not for the weak of spirit...or stornach, It is, however, a victory for all of us who love the combat aspects of games like AGE OF EMPIRES and WARCRAFT, but could do without the endless gathering and building, Featuring a physics-based 3D engine and spectacular graphic violence, MYTH stops the standard real-time strategy game to the hone. What it leaves behind is brutal and bloody combat that is engaging, addictive, and bir riming with more attitude than a surly dwarf.



The premise of MYALIs pretty standard. An army of the undead is ravaging your homeland, and you must drive them ont or be destroyed. Orchmanly, a premuse this tired would choke the originality out of a product, but MYD3 story stands out because it is detailed, original, and wellintegrated into the game. The prologue, cut-seenes, and untolding plot combine to involve you in the conflict at a deeper level than a shallow back-story ever could. You get an actual sense of unease as you face the dark times ahead



SNOW BLIND Weather effects, including snow, can affect your troops performances.

option for modern games.

In creating the characters for MYD), Bungle wisely decided to mix a few familiar faithay staples with some new creations of its own. You will immediately recognize the dwarves, foot soldiers, and archers. The unfamiliar elements come in the form of the walking dead, gruntlike thralfs, spirit spearmen known (appropriately) as soulless, exploding gas-filled corpses called wights, and others.

Each unit, friend or foe, has a unique name and a unique history. As the men under your command gain experience, they become more effective and more

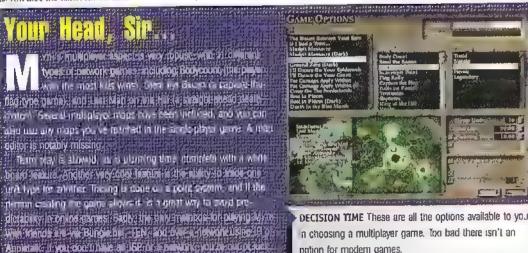
valuable. An archer with 10 kills will fire faster and more accurately than an archer who has never seen action. As you progress through the missions, veter ans that have survived previous battles. will occupy the positious that would outenvise he filled by raw recruits.

TALK ABOUT A CONTROL FETISH!

You observe and control your units from an overhead perspective. Not only can you move your point of view forward, back, left, and right, but you can rotate your perspective based on two separate



Price: \$49 95 Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 133 Windows 95 or NT 4.0, 16MB RAM (32MB recommended), 31MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-ROM drive, 16-bit SVGA video card. Microsoft compatible mouse, 28 8Kbps connection for Internet play Macintosh: Power Mac 100Mhz, System 7.5, 16-bit monitor, 640x480 resolution graphics. Multiplayer Support: TCP/IP LAN, Internet (2-16 players). Designer: Jason Jones Publisher: Bungle (800) 295 0060 www.bungie.com





GET IN LINE! MYTH is a difficult game that demands excellent strategy and unit control. Placing troops in 1 of 10 formations is a key to victory

focal points. One rotation pivots around the center of your field of view, allowing you to circle whatever you are looking at, The other allows you to rotate in place. which gives you a view of the surrounding area. At first, moving around and directing troops using this view system is a bit difficult. With practice, however, you will quickly learn to appreciate the view system's flexibility. My only complaint about the controls is that you should be able to adjust the view's angle of elevation, as fighting on high ground frequently left me unable to see enough of the battlefield to fight effectively. Otherwise, I found that the controls worked well and were well thought-out.

DANCE OF THE DEAD

Most games offer you a few easy beginning scenarios before getting to the meat of the game. MYIH does not. Make no mistake; this game is difficult.

The most surprising thing about the gameplay is the degree of strategy required to win any given scenario. You begin each mission with a set number of units, and unless you find additional troops wandering around the level (or fighting for their lives), that's all you have to work with. MYTH allows you to arrange your units in a variety of formations. Surprisingly, these formations actually work. From vanguards to staggered lines, how you arrange your forces affects your strategy and your chances for survival. If you want to have any veterans left for the next scenario, you will need to figure out an effective way of deploying your troops

based on their number and composition. You also need to factor in the environment and the makeup of your opposition. Leave a flank exposed and you'll soon find a couple of apelike ghôls hack-

ing apart your archers with their scythes. Fail to take the high ground and you'll be showered with spears as the soulless come over the rise. Let the wights get too close and these walking bombs will shred your tanks with wave after wave of earth-shaking explosions. In short, you need to think ahead to win

YOU LOOK GOOD IN RED

The action happens in a beautifully rendered world. Arrows and bonds are gracefully toward their targets, blood stains the ground where it falls, and freshly removed heads roll slowly downhill. The dwarves' explosives blacken the earth and the remains of corpses lie in heaps on the ground. Seasons, and weather, change, bringing rain and snow that affects the performance of your troops. Wind blows arrows off course, and rain dampens the fuses of dwarven bombs.

The 3Dfx rendering is marvelous, but there is a catch—the game shipped with a bug in the Voodoo Rush routines that sometimes crashes the game while load-



MAKING A MESS A couple of dwarves can really ruln an enemy's day. If friendly troops are in the way, they'll ruln yours, too.

ing levels. Its disappointing that Bungle would put so much effort into this game and then ship it with game-crashing bugs. There is a patch available online, but that doesn't excuse the fact that the retail version isn't a fully working product.

But MYTH kicks some serious butt. Not since DIABLO has a game so captured my attention and waking hours. With its blend of in-your-face combat, realistic termin and weather, and entertaining characters, MYTH is a winner.

DAPPEAL: Anyone who loves graphic tactical combat but could do without the building and harvesting that usually goes with it.

>PROS: Outstanding engine, gameplay, story, and environment; addictive gameplay.

PCOMS: View system needs elevation controls; game has crash bug; no modem-to-modem or direct-cable support; no map editor.





FALCON 4.0 IS NOW CLEARED FOR FINAL APPROACH COM NO ON



Frontal Assault

TalonSoft's Reach Exceeds Its Latest Engine's Grasp

by Loyd Case

AST FRONT - an ambitious game that depicts small-unit actions in detail during the Immense struggle for Mother Russa duong World War Hseems to be a wargamer's dream title. The new game engine (though still turnbased) is now fully 32-bit and Windows 95-optimized. The maps are dynamically generated using a terrain tiling system in the compaign, and as you play through the game you run into quite a variety of terrain and weather. There are 49 historical sectiontos (including a siege-oriented scenario created by veteran game-designer Jim Dunnigm) and three tutorial scenarios. Despite all this, however, the EAST FRONT experience falls well short of being that of a great game.



The interface in EAST FRONT is quite similar to the one used in TalonSofts
BATTLECROUND series, but now there's a nafty database of unit types that you access by the use of hotkeys. There's also

a new toolbar at the bottom of the screen that's less intimidating than that of earlier TalonSoft games. The only issue I have with the interface is the use of a modal switch between fire and movement. You learn quickly to hold the Ctrl key down to enter fire mode; it's altogether. too easy to press the "next turn" button.

which is adjacent to the move/fare mode button on the toolbar.

Each unit represents a platoon or battery of artillery You must call in both indirect artillery fire and air strikes a turn ahead, and you have a braited number of air strikes available in a given battle. Movement of all unit types is pretty straightforward, whether you use the ususe or the keyboard. There are quite a few hotkey equivalents, which

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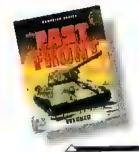
HEX AGONY in most games, these infantry units would have trouble with Saviet lanks, but not in EAST FRONT.

are conveniently printed on the back of the manual.

Speaking of the manual, it's very thin, and barely scratches the surface of how to play the game. For example, supply is handled through the use of HQ units, yet there's almost no discussion of how these rules work. The READ ME file contains some additional information, as do the tutorials. Still, there's far too bitle information, especially when you con-

trast FAST FRONT's manual with the one meluded in CLOSE COMBALZ, another recent WWII small-unit game (see the review elsewhere in this section)

There are some troubling design features as well If you thought infantry was USCLESS IN STEEL PANTHERS, be prepared for the opposite problem in EAST FRONT. The German infantry in particular is so extraordinarily tough as to be quite unrealistic Several times I attempted assaults with multiple armor plateons on single, often severely damaged, Cerman infantry units in open terrain, only to get a bloody nose in the process.



Price: \$49.95 (street) Minimum System Requirements: 486 DX (Pentium 133 or better strangly recommended), Windows 95, 8MB RAM (16-32MB recommended), 16-bit high-color SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM (4x recommended), mouse supports Win 95-compatible sound cards. Multiplayer Support: Hotseat, email, LAN, and Internet (2 players). Designers: John Tiller, Bob McNamara, and Charlie Kibler Publisher: Ta onSoft Forest Hil., MD (800) 211-6504 www.talensoft.com Distributor: Broderbund Software, Inc. Novato CA (415) 382-4400 www.broderbund.com



STALINGRAD SNAPSHOT The extensive WWII database is just a keypress away.

Certainly the quality of Russian units early in the war may have been questionable, but this occurred even with the Soviet Cuards armored units in the 1944 scenarios!

The use of leaders is also interesting, but the implementation is flawed. It's great that leaders can rally disrupted units, but leaders alone in clear terrain shouldn't be able to fend off multiple SMC platoons.

A SCENARIO FOR ALL SEASONS

The real strength of EAST FRONT lies in its numerous historical scenarios. The fimetable ranges from the opening of Barbarossa through Operation Citadel (Kursk) up to the desperate retreats of 1944. Since the scenarios are precreated, the starting positions tend to follow the historical deployments.

Some of the battles are big. Dead End on the Road to Kursk, for example, is a 30-turn scenario with hundreds of units. When I played the Germans, it took the Al 35 minutes to complete the opening turn on a 266MHz Pentium II with 64MB of RAM. Even when playing smaller scenarios, you should plan on having something else to do when the computer is moving, as it does "think" for quite a while.

Overall, EAST FRONT is a mixed bag: It's a very ambitious and interesting little that was simply shipped too soon. It's probably worth getting for the historical scenarios, but the campaign engine needs work (see the sidebar). There are other nice touches, such as the oversized hexes, in which you can actually see all of the "stacked" units-which makes the job of searching for specific unit types in a large firefight much easier. The use of Action Points makes the issue of artificial overrun rules mont Each unit has 100 action points (which get used at different rates by different unit types). As long as the active unit has sufficient action points it can continne to move, fire, or assault.

EAST FRONT also ships with a terrific scenario editor. You can edit existing scenarios or create your own (including maps). It's one of the most flexible and

easy-to-use editors I've seen in some time. Pinally, there are extensive twoplayer options.

Still, all of the good things about FASI FRONT can't hide its many problems. As of press time, TalonSoft has released two patches and additional documentation that fix some of the problems, but seem to have created others. If, like me, you are captivated enough by the historical period to try EASI FRONT despite its shortcomings, be aware that the game is still very much a work in progress.

▶ APPEAL: Afficionades of WWII tactical combat who have a lot of patience.

PROS: Gorgeous graphics; numerous historical scenarios; a great scenario editor.

PCONS: Flawed campaign battle-generator; *ubermensch* infantry; incredibte amount of time for At moves; weak manual.







Off to Market



Real-time Wargaming Comes of Age

by Patrick C. Miller

LOSE COMBAR A BRIDGE Too Far isn't a game to be played so much as experienced. You experience disappointment when an attack bogs down for lack of armor support, frustration when troops under fire refuse to obey orders, and remorse when heroes of earlier battles are mercilessly out down by enemy machine-gun fire. Yet you also have feelmgs of elation when victory is achieved against insurmountable odds, satisfaction as facties start to chek, and accomplishment after completing a difficult çampaigu.



Based on Operation Market Garden during World War II, this game delivers the pressure, tension, and drama of tactical warfare at close range. Plus, it's all done on extraordinarily detailed maps, in 16-bit color Real-time gameplay GARDEN OF DEATH

The watter Market Garden began of september 17, 1844, when the useries of American British and Polish paratruspers were drapped into Helland to seize a series of bridges along a 50 mile paratruspers. The British 10th Corps attacked northward to link us with the paratrophers. If the apparation had gone as planned, it would have analised the Allies to cross the Rhine River at Arnhem and attack Germany Media possibly anding the war in Europe before Christmas. Unfortunately, the Allies ignered intelligence reports indicating the presence of two German \$5 armered livisions in and around their group zones.

Biven the questionable decision to have 30th Corps attack up a single, easily defended roat—and the fact that the Germans captured the complete Allied battle plan. It's a wonder the operation came a close to success as it still in the sent Market Garden cost the Allied 17,000 casualties without echieving the objective of capturing a bridge over the River of America Of pourse, one of the maintreasen we play wargames to be change history.... Good luck. If you think you can do better then the mistorical commanders here a reunalisation.

combines with an emphasis on troop morale, physical and mental states, and battle experience to propel A BRIDGE TOO FAR into the realm of realistic combat simulation. Although turnbased wargames will always be popular, they can't compete with A BRIDGE. Too FAR in providing a sense of what it must be like to command individual soldiers in combat.



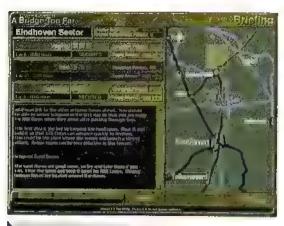
Price: \$54 95 Minimum System Requirements: Pentium 90. Windows 95 or better, 16MB RAM. 45MB hard-drive space, SVGA graphics with 800x600 high-color (16-bit) resolution, 4x CD ROM drive, mouse; supports Win 95-compatible sound cards Macintosh: Power PC. System 7.5, 16MB RAM, 40MB hard-drive space. 800x600 graphics, 4x CD-ROM mouse. Multiplayer Support:

Multiplayer Support:
TCP/IP, LAN, or 28.8Kbps
moders (2 players). Note:
Internet Garning Zone available for Win 95/Windows
NT Lases only.
Designer: Atomic Garnes
Publisher: Microsoft
Corporation

Redmond WA (206) 882-8080

www.microsoft.com

TOY SOLDTERS Unlike the original Close Comear, even the zoomed-in view of A Baidge Too Far is useful. Check out the detail of the infantry and tanks?



LOGISTIC LOGIC in the campaign game, you must decide which sectors of the operation are the most crucial and should receive the greatest amount of supplies.

When Microsoft released CLOSE COMBAT more than a year ago, there was nothing quite like it on the market. The designers at Atomic Cames have now raised that standard even further by smoothing CLOSE COMBAT's rough edges. This time, the company has included features that not only add variety and improve gameplay, but also provide a significant amount of long-term replay value—one of the original game's greatest shortcomings.

From a gameplay perspective, A BRIDGE TOO FAR isn't all that different from CLOSE COMBAT. The emphasis remains on tactical engagements between infantry sections and individual vehicles. However, many of the changes implemented in the sequel have made what was a good game outstanding. The interface is more responsive and intuitive. Map scrolling is smoother There are more units and more missions (and greater mission variety). You can edit missions with the Battlemaker feature to design new scenarios (although there is no way to create additional maps). The game's stronger strategic element provides more depth to the dynamic campaign, and modern-to-modern play has been added. Also, network play is more stable than before.

The game comes with 33 battles, which can be played separately or as part of 11 multibattle operations. There are three campaigns, based on battles in the Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Amhem sectors. The ultimate challenge is the grand campaign

APPEAL: Gamers looking for a realistic, tactical-level combat simulation.

PROS: A wide range of battles on highly detailed maps; 130 different units; a dynamic campaign with strategic depth; realistic tactical combat; scenario editor; multiplayer support.

PCONS: A few minor bugs; no map editor; no interior walls; you can't face soldiers in a particular direction.



that requires players to manage units and allocate resources in all three sectors. When you play as the Allies, the key is to capitalize on the element of surprise and then defend supply zones and bradges until 30th Corps arrives. The Germans must make the enemy

paratroopers pay a high price for their initial gains while minimizing their own losses until an armored counterattack can be launched. As was the case historically, the strategic situation favors the Germans.

HITTING THE DIRT

The game isn't that difficult to play, but it is tough to master. There are only seven commands: move, move fast, sneak, fire, fire smoke, hide, and defend. Giving unit orders is fairly simple; you use either a mouse-activated menu or keyboard commands. Some players have a hard time getting used to the combat stress psychological model that can cause units to act out their own initiative. Occasionally, this results in heroic behavior, but more often, self-preservation instincts prevail. Players must also develop effective factics and small-unit strategies to have any hope for success when playing at the lagher degrees of realism.

Not all changes made were for the better, nor is the game without some minor flaws. Because soldiers are larger, buildings no longer have the interior walls that sometimes made for interesting Indoor firefights. The game replay feature is gone, as



LINE OF FRIGHT While line-of-sight to a target Isn't always visually obvious, the game's intuitive interface makes it a snap to determine.

is the ability to give units orders to defend or face in a specific direction. Although some buildings in the game are designed to allow vehicles to enter them, there are bugs in the game that sometimes enable a tank or antitank gun to get the benefit of being on top of a multilevel building. Tanks sometimes have problems deciding which way to face. As a result, a tank's hull sometimes appears to be doing the rumba with its turret.

Fans of turn-based wargames might be inclined to write off A BRIDGE TOO FAR as a samplistic real-time clickfest or yet another effort that sacrifices gameplay for eye candy. But they would be very wrong in that assessment, for A BRIDGE TOO FAR is an engrossing affair; one in which you can easily become immersed for hours. No other game can touch it for conveying the sights, sounds, and feel of combat at the buttend of a rifle **%**



...did you get those cards?



DUFIS OF THE PLANESWALKERS"

THE CRITICS AGREE!

"MicroProse's game offers weeks to months of gameplay." Computer Gaming World, June '97

"Magic; The Gathering is just what the Samite Healer ordered."

Computer Games Strategy Plus, June '97

"Magic: The Gathering is a near-perfect translation of the card game." PC Magazine, June '97

"...hard-core gamers will appreciate the flexibility offered in the computer version."

Newsweek, April '97

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Pax Nausea

MEMERIALE .

This Ambitious Trip in the Final Frontier Is Fraught With Problems

by Tim Carter

s any intergalactic traveler. will tell you, a key element of space exploration is communication: the ereation and management of a consistent flow of information, PAX IMPERIA 2. the long-awated sequel to the popular Macantosh product, gives gamers virtually everything they could ask for in a space-based strategy game...except decent communication. The designers have left out or obfuscated the flow of information within the

NEW FRONTIERS

enjoy the game.

game's interface to the point that it

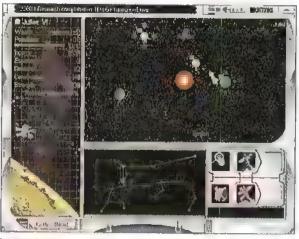
seriously hampers your ability to

PAX IMPERIA 2 offers a package of options and challenges similar to that of MASTER OF ORION 2, with the addition of a real-tane interface. Frankly, I'm not sure that realtime works well for a grand strategy game. Why should a galactic emperor be rushed, when turns are measured in years rather than minutes? Also, with many things going on in disparate parts of the galaxy, it's easy to miss an important event or activity—to the detriment of your empire.

Which brings up the question of information. Pax Isarias 2 has many interesting features; a decent technology free, some good economic options, and many more espionage and "black ops" opportunities than in similar games. Most of these features, however, are poorly explained and are difficult to use properly.

The manual is so sparse that you will be left guessing about many aspects of gameplay Further, no list of technology, ship design, or colony buildings is provided.

Also, there is little opportunity to cross-reference information. For instance, zooming in on a planet allows you to pull up a menu of the buildings. available for construction: Unfortunately, it doesn't tell you what any of them do. To get that information, you have to go back to the technology management screen, then go back to the planet in question to give your orders.



THE GOOD AND BAD While Pax has plenty of options and depth, It's skimpy on information and requires far too much micromanagement.

TEDIUM AD INFINITUM

The game's interface makes your development either tedious (if you micromanage it) or boring (if you let the computer handle things). Defensive installations are also a drag, as they cannot be ordered in advance. You must return to each planet after each construction to give new orders. As you aren't prompted when each installation is finished, you have to check regularly—lest your border colonies revert to economically inclined production.

If a planet has all of the buildings available at your current technology level, it will do nothing unless specifically ordered to do something—even if there are orbital systems available for construction

Another problem stems from the random setup. Because the map consists of a relatively small set (the default is 20) of interlinked planets, with only a few wormholes between them, your initial exploration is generally predetermined by the map. Yet, the random setup does not include a basic algorithm for separating players at the beginning of the game.

Once in a while, this "feature" worked to my advantage by pitting Al races

against each other early on, and giving me relatively unchecked reign over other parts of the galaxy

lactical combat, supposedly a major part of the game, is actually quite duil. If you have the right number of superior ships, you'll win. If you don't, you'll lose. As defensive technologies progress faster than offen-

sive technologies, the middle game often plays out like World Wor I: lots of pointless attacks, little progress.

Many of these problems could be fixed through a tighter interface and better documentation. Right now, PAX IMPERIA 2 feels like an unfinished product with considerable potential but little polish. It looks and sounds good, but can't deliver a consistently enjoyable gaming experience. §

>APPEAL: Strategy gamers looking for depth who don't mind a rude awakening to realtime.

PROS: Good depth; lots of options; good espionage system.

Appallingly bad information management; bad Al; weak tactical system; realtime seems pointless.





Price: \$49 95
Minimum System
Requirements:
4860X/100 (P133 recommended), 16MB
RAM, Windows 95
155MB hard-drive
space 2x CD ROM
drive (8x recommended), Windows 95-compatible sound card and

Multiplayer Support: Modem (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-16 players), Designer: Heliotrope Studios Publisher: THO

Calabasas, CA (818) 591-1310 www.thg.com



Mind Your Own Business

Wanna Be the Next Bill Gates? Here's Your Chance

by Scott A. May

h, co co su yo wl tal Bi Sh

h, the life of a computer company CEO. What could be easier? Brain surgery, for starters. If you've ever wondered whether you've got what at takes to become the next Bill Gates or Steve Jobs, let Stardocks ENTREPRENEUR be your proving ground.

But be warned: The job ain't what it's cracked up to be.

In a nutshell, ENTREPRENEUR is a game of global economic domination, much like I-Magie's CAPITALISM or Tsunami's FREE ENTERPRISE. Believe it or not, Stardock Systems — until now premier OS/2 game designers — actually likens the game to Electronic Arts' legendary M.U.L.E. The difference is in the game's focus.

In ENTREPRENEUR, you're the CEO

of a multinational computer manufacturer, competing against up to eight sinnlar hightech companies for worldwide market share. Although a PC product line is your only option at present, Stardock promises to add more diverse markets in the future. But for now, you'll have your hands full just learning to survive in the cutthroat world of high-tech high



You begin the game by choosing your area of expertise; manufacturing, marketing, or resenreh. The choice you make essentially doubles your potential advantage in that area. You then pick names for your company and CEO By default, you compete against three computer-controlled companies with satirical names such as Mitrosoft, LaST, and Itty Billy Machines (IBM). It's a big world, but three competitors is plenty for starters. As you gain experience and become bored with winning, you can increase the number of competing companies to a maximum of seven. Other factors determine the game's overall challenge, including five difficulty levels, seven game speeds, and the ability to adjust your initial startup funds. Finally, the game offers a choice of 12 different worlds in which to compete, ranging

from the entire globe to only the United States, Plus, several fictitious maps are thrown in for good measure.

LEARNING THE ROPES

The game unfolds on a scrolling global map, which is divided into regions. Icon button bars line the bottom and right side of the screen, providing instant access to market share, demographic data (both global and regional), bar graphs, and pie charts. A color-coded overview map and winning bar lets you see at a glance how well your company is faring. Market news periodically flashes across the top of the screen, while a status bar at the bottom tracks your current assets and time line.

The gameplay is in accelerated realtime Basic tasks include researching regional demographics, manufacturing your product, and tweaking several of its



RISKY BUSINESS Balancing production, marketing, and research—with one eye on the bottom line—is ENTREPRENEUR's biggest charlenge and greatest reward.



Price: \$49.95 Minimum System Requirements: 486DX4/75 (Pentium recommended), Windows 95/NT 4.0 or 05/2 4.0, 12M8 RAM (16MB recommended), 10MB hard-drive space, DirectX compatible SVGAgraphics video card (DIVEcompatible for OS/2). DirectX- or DART- (0S/2) compatible sound card, mouse, IPX connection for multiplayer games Multiplayer Support: Modern (2 players), LAN, Internet (2-8 players) Designer: Brad Wardell Publisher: Stardock Systems Livonia, MI (888) 782-7362 www.stardock.com

finances.

attributes; reliability, aesthetics, ease of use, performance, and prestige. If customers aren't clamormg for your product, you create demand by using a variety of marketing tools. If demand is high, you must step up production by himng more employees and building bigger factories. When consumers become dissatisfied with your product, you must invest money into research to improve your PCs' key components and match consumer desires.

All the while, you have to keep a sharp eye on the bottom line to assure that you're not spending more than you're making. It's a nonstop balancing act and, despite the game's placid outward demeanor, it can be totally nerve-racking. Consumer confidence slips, employee morale nose-dives, careless expansion prevents you from upgrading existing facilities, markets fluctuate or tumble, and so on. There are so many factors to juggle, you'll be as bald and ulcer

ndden as a real-life CEO in no time. Welcome to the big leagues.

THAT'S NOT ALL!

Direct Action Cards represent the dark side of corporate strategy. Players earn eards based on their accumulated resource pool. The primary purpose of these cards is to trump your opponents when they've grown too powerful. If your chief competitor is gaining market share, you can play a card that announces a legal suit over copyright infringements and watch consumer confidence in their product humble. Or you can use a card to lure a key executive away from the competition. Dirty tricks? You bet. This is war, after all

In single-player mode, the game is constantly challenging, thanks to an aggressive, take-no-prisoners Al. Subtle and merciless, the Al will relentlessly blast you with marketing FUD (fear,



FUD SLINGING You can launch sometimes distasteful campaigns to discredit your opponents or erode consumer confidence in their products.



BUSINESS AS USUAL ENTREPRENEUR'S graphics are serviceable, but could have used some multimedia seasoning to lure potential CEOs.

uncertainty, and doubt). And just when you think you have your computer opponent on the ropes, it will aim a campaign at your strongest regions. As in real life, market volatility means the tide can turn repeatedly throughout a single game. Multiplayer mode is even more fun. Up to eight would-be tycoons can compete via LAN connection or over the Internet (using Stardocknet). Logging on and creating or joining an ordine game is a breeze

THE EXTRAS

Game graphics are clean, yet extremely simplistic (almost shareware quality). Beyond the map's animated water and the constantly updated market data, most game screens are static, with little or no ambient sound. Unfortunately, this is exactly the kind of game that needs some multimedia window dressing to liven things up and draw new

players into the action. Navigating the game's marketing, and research screens also takes time to master, but after several games, it becomes second nature

Despite its share of grammatical and factual errors, the game's documentation is well-written and personable. The designers obviously live and breathe this stuff, because the manual for the game continues to pitch the product, even though you've already purchased it

In addition to pointby-point descriptions of each game element, the manual also includes a nice walkthrough, which takes great strides to acelimate newcomers to the gaming system. Although the basies of gameplay are not terribly complicated, the learning curve here is still substantially steep. In many ways, it's almost better if you have no economic background, That way, you

aren't attempting to apply real-world economics to the game's slightly skewed, simplified model.

In the end, ENTREPREMEUR is much more fun than a spreadsheet, but it takes almost as long to fully learn. Patience is definitely a virtue here, but tenacious gamers will be rewarded with a fun inside peek at the sink-or-swim world of business strategy.

PAPPEAL: Real-time strategy fans with a flair for corporate economics.

PROS: Outstanding computer AI; addictive gameplay; effortless multiplayer setup; good sense of humor.

CONS: Graphics are bone dry; steep learning curve; Interface could use a bit of tweaking.





Winds of Change

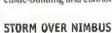
Stormy Combat Game Brings New Energy to Real-Time Strategy

by Tahsin Shamma

discussion of the recent weather forecast may be fine for small talk, but find a room filled with real-time gamers and any talk of a NETSTORM is likely to bring more than just plain chitchat, NUTS form is a game like no other. It invig orates a genre that some feel is becoming too repetitive. Yet its originality risks alienating real-time

A word of advice. NETS FORM can intrigue and enthrall you, if you're willing to accept the fact that real-time strategy games are not all the same 'The only eame that I can recall with a similar feel was Atari's RAMPART (an areade game of castle-building and camou-firing)

gamers who are just settling into the traditional WARCRAFT 2 game design.



Price: \$46 95

Requirements:

Minimum System

Pent um 90, Windows

95, 16M8 RAM, 15M8

VLB or PCI video card

with 1MB RAM Sound Biaster-companible

sound card. Microsoft-

compatible mouse Multiplayer Support:

Modern (2 players),

LAN, Internet (2-8

Designer: Titanic

Los Angeles, CA

(800) 477-3650 www.activision.com

Publisher: Activision

Entertainment

players)

hard-drive snace, 2x CD-ROM drive, SVGA

NETSTORM takes place in the mythical world of Nimbus. The world is divided into three "spheres" of interaction; the Serenisphere, a beaven in which players match up for Net battles; the Pyrosphere, the island-laden arena in which players engage in combat; and the Densphere, the lowest realm, from which the Fones burl up Storm Geysers to fuel the battles above. Of these spheres, players will enter only the first two: the third, where the Puries of Wind, Ram, and Thunder battle, is an imaginary realm whose sole purpose is to provide atmosphere and backstory.

Players begin on floating islands in the



HOLY DEFENSES, BATMAN! This altar is well defended by Wind Towers and Crossbows. The goal of each mission is to securice enemy Priests here.

Pyrosphere and must construct bridges to launch assaults against others. This may seem like an annecessary addition to the gameplay, but it enhances strategic thinking, as no two bridges may overlap. Thus, it is possible to entpple an enemy just by cutting off his avenues of coststruction. If enemy bridges surround a player, he can't extend his own bridges to attack other players.

RESOURCES AND CONSTRUCTION

Players have the ability to harvest the energy brought up in Storm Ceysers as Storm Crystals, The crystals provide Storm Power that is used to construct weapons, buildings, and units, as well as to east spells. Players use their Storm

Aerial Attack Units: These units are

Power through the single High Priest, an avatarlike unit in gameplay. The High Priest is the only unit capable of constructing buildings - including the all-important temple, which allows players to harness Storm Power and radiates the necessary power for building units. The fact that only priests can construct buildings implif seem as if it would hinder construction, but there are really only two buildings that need to be built to start any game.

Once players build a temple, the workshop fulfills the role of the traditional "barracks" site. The workshop offers various unit types, including "generator" units that allow you to extend the range of your temple's Storm Power.

Address of the same

NerSroam's new units may seem odd and difficult to handle at first, but a quick glance at a unit's design demonstrates its usefulness.

Crossbow: Due to its wide field of fire and rapid reloading, the crossbow is great as an assault weapon or a defensive post to fend off aerial





Cannons: The Ice cannons and Thunder cannons have great power but: fixed facing, This makes the weaker, but more versatile, Sun cannon more useful.



CGW

attackers.

FEBRUARY 1998

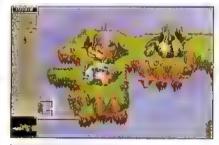
COMBAT IN THE CLOUDS

In NETSTORM, placement is the supreme factor when deciding what to build and how to attack an opponent. In other games, a mobile unit is built and ordered around. But in this game, every combat unit is autonomous, with the exception of transports. If you place a weapon on the ground, it attacks a target in its own way, without waiting for instruction. So in effect, the placement of units determines how successful they are. The ultimate goal is to capture the opponent's priest and saenfice him on an altar. Once you kill him, you will gain the dead priest's knowledge and Storm Power. In this way, you increase your own Priest's skills.

For those who are withing to brave the unique gameplay and keep their minds open to a new version of real-time gaming, NFTSTORM is quite a find. But this creative brainstorm still lacks some simple elements.

The biggest drawback is the absence of a save-

game feature for the single-player campaign. The campaign proceeds in three parts, in addition to a tutorial that instructs players in placing units and gathering Storm Power The early missions in the campaign are fast enough that you don't notice the lack



TRATEGY/WARGAM

GET PAST THIS! This shot shows your buildings and the bridge pieces you use to connect to Storm Gaysers.

of a save feature, but the later missions, some of which last two hours, practically demand it. Combine this oversight with a lack of difficulty settings, and campaigns become a do-or-die feat

There are a few other unrealistic elements in the gameplay as well. If a section of an extended bridge between land and an attached unit is destroyed, the rest of the bridge hangs in midalr, along with any units attached to it. The selection of bridge tiles is also too random for my tastes. In strategy games, you want as few variables as possible when fending off opponents. The randomized selection of bridge pieces sometimes

makes you feel as if you are playing TETRIS.

All in all, NETSTORM is a good game and deserves high marks for demonstrating that all real-time games don't have to be alike. The drawbacks—especially the lack of a savegame feature—are annoying, but, on the whole, the game brings welcome new energy to a genre that is crowded with clones. §

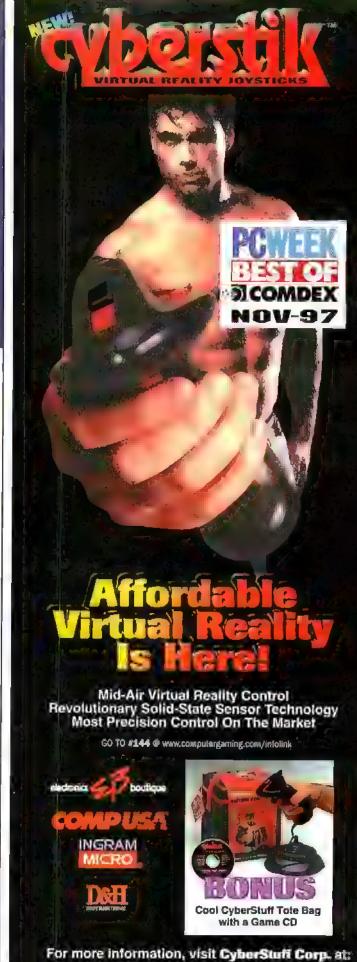
►APPEAL: Real-time strategy gamers looking for an original game design.

PROS: Innovative combat style that

demands new levels of strategic thinking,

PCOMS: No save-game feature or difficulty settings in single-player mode.





www.cyberstuff.com



A Pale Shadow

Despite Grant and Sherman, This Battle Is Much Less Than Expected

by Jim Cobb



OBESCI E. LEE, CIVIL WAR GENERAL tried to ride that general's coattails through a PANZER GENERAL-style branching campaign, complete with simple combat mechanics and an emphasis on leadership. While it sold reasonably well, its atten-

tion to detail and graphic polish were lacklaster compared to the award-winning TalonSoft BAPTLEGROUND series. CIVIL WAR GENERALS 2 (CWC2), despite the addition of Crant and Sherman, is anything but

an improvement.

HOME BEFORE THE **LEAVES TURN**

CWG2s strength lies in its campaigns: 17 of them (linking 45 different Civil War engagements) cover every aspect of the Eastern and Western theaters from both Union and Confederate perspectives. Depending on the degree of victory or defeat, you move from one conflict to the next, sometimes fighting alter-

natives to the historical battles. As in ROBERT E, LEE, you can dismiss mept leaders and reequip your units with the spoils of war; also, unit and leader qualities improve as they gain experience.

For all their drama, however, the campaigns have some problems. Sometimes an alternate battle occurs within hours of the first. How can leaders be dismissed and units be reequipped and brought back to full strength so quickly? Worse, some orders of battle are of questionable historical accuracy, such as the Iron Brigade being present at First Bull Run. While some of the regiments were there, the Iron Brigade, as such, didn't exist until 1862.

The combat system, too, has its ups and downs. Unit capabilities are a function of organization, health (strength), and morale. As the unit moves and fights, these values drop; adequate rest, supplies, and digging in improve them Regimental and brigade leaders have ratings for health, initiative, organization, and ability to inspire loyalty. Divisional, corps, and army commanders can posttively or negatively modify subordinate leaders' ratings. All in all, CWG2 does a good tob of showing the intangibles of Civil War combat, and the variety of weapons systems - while less detailed

NO TRUTH IN ADVERTISING Some campaigns are fun, while others are misleading. Shiloh leaves out Forts Henry and Donelson

than those of the BATTLEGROUND series - are modeled well enough.

NOT SO SHARP SHOOTERS

It's a real shock, then, that CWC25 combat mechanics impale themselves on their own simplicity. Thirty minutes per turn at 200 yards per bex is a workable scale, but not when you have limited stacking. Only field artillery units can stack with other unit types. Thus, leaders are not only vulnerable but actually block movement, small numbers of sharpshooters handle like brigades, diminished regiments can't shelter with stronger units. Worse, infantry units don't have ranged fire, but must be adjacent to a target and attempt to close The sequence of "attacker fire, defender morale ebeck, defender fire, attacker morale check, close combat" works fine for a charge, but at 200 yards, units should be able to shoot without closing.

The variety of mats in CWG2 is wasted, because nothing works as it should. Artiflery, for example, employs ranged fire. But it can fire only once per turn, it can't support friendly units, and it can't both move and fire in a 30-minute tism Likewise, the lack of skirmishers is a problem in this seale, and you can't fake it by using your sharpshooters in a skir-

> mish role, because of the odd stacking rules

> The battles themselves are less conflicts of lines advancing or standing than they are unsupported units that simply charge alread. The Als. propensity for making piecemeal attacks aggravates this feeling of a brawl. Thus, the combat system makes it Impossible to win using historically authentic tactics.

In passing, it's only fair to mention that CWG2 does come with an easy-to-use seenano maker and a mee CD history of the war. It's a pity

that these elements are wasted on a completely broken combat system and a dated game engine. &

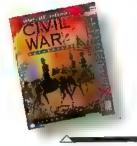
APPEAL: Those who want to play Grant and Sherman, as well as Lee.

>PROS: Branching campaign with interesting "alternate history" batties: nice scenario editor.

COMS: Tactical system bears only

a vague resemblance to Civil War combat: dated engine; battles themselves aren't very interesting.





Price: \$49 95 (street) Minimum System Requirements: 465/66 (Pentium recommended), 16MB RAM, 52MB hard drive space, Windows 3.1 or better, SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM (4x recom mended), supports Sound Blaster-compatible sound cards.

Multiplayer Support: Internet or LAN (2 players), requires 14 4Kbps modem plus ISP or network. Designer: Impressions Software

> Publisher: Sterra On-Line, Inc. Bellevue, WA (800) 757-7707

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Metropolis D I g I t a I



Artificial Insanity

Anark's Evolution in Platform Games Will Drive You Crazy

Mendel

by Mark Clarkson

ALAPACIOS is absolutely maddening. Even after all the hours Even after all the hours Eve spent playing the game, I'm hard-pressed to know what to make of it. The second most maddening thang about CALABAGOS is its star, Mendel Guiding Mendel through a level is like herding a blind cat through a boobytrapped maze with gentle words of encouragement — that is, It's just this side of impossible

The gammick is this: Mendel has a numd of his own. A nudge from the mouse may turn Mendel one direction or the other, but only if he is in the mood

Now, most games have AI of some kind, but it is typically in the form of hard-coded instructions. Alendel's smarts, on the other hand, derive from a special kind of adaptive artificial intelligence called nonstationary entropic reduction mapping

(NERM). He isn't programmed to do anything in particular, he learns from his environment

Exactly what Mendel is learning is far from clear, but being repeatedly electrocuted or dropped into freezing lakes of liquid nitrogen by ham-handed players will certainly make him nervous. Soon, he'll refuse to go where you want him to go. Fle'll instead wander in hesitant circles, mewling plaintively and ignoring your frantic midges.

IT'S UP TO YOU

Mendel isn't called upon to solve the game's puzzles by himself—the real

work is up to you. You must insimpulate Mendels 3D environment—think Super Escher World—and lead him to safety. To make a path, you might extrude platforms from a wall or synchronize flying blocks.

Clicking on some platforms pops

upward, trampoline-style, while clicking on

FLY ON A WALL. Whether viewed during normal gameplay or in close-up, Mendel appears as a sort of technopunk Insectold. You'll have to decide for yourself if his At is equal to that of a terrestrial ant.

o do other platforms whisks him from floor rom his to floor as if he were on flying elevators. Hidden shortcuts allow you to bypass chunks of the puzzle by performing especially intricate sequences of moves. And there are always assort-

of moves. And there are always assorted electrifying fields, crushing blocks, freezing lakes, and fatal falls awaiting Mendel Items deadly to Mendel are often out of sight until the instant they kill him, which brings us to

CALAPACOS' most maddening feature. the damned swooping camera.

The camera follows Mendel through the level, tagging along behind for a while, then flying past him, or shooting heavenward for a different angle. Since you have no control over the camera (and precious little control over Mendel), you're pretty much restricted to seeing only what's shown to you.

Clicking on a switch may be a simple task, but getting Mendel into position so

that you can see the switch in the first place is often quite a trick. And even if that switch is holding still in the game world, your view is circling. Hitting hotspots as they plunge madly across your screen can be a real challenge. This is obviously by design, but it may limit the appeal of this game, as many who might be attracted to GALAPAGOS' puzzles could be put off by this emphasis on eve/mouse coordination.

Those souls brave enough to try it will find that CALAPACOS is a lovely and innovative game. It made good use of my Intense 3D Voodoo Rush eard, with scrolling textures and rafty fog effects. And while I'll admit that CALAPACOS frequently

made me seream out load in frustration, I also found the game so addictive that I couldn't stop playing it. **%**

DAPPEAL: Fans of fast-action puzzle games looking for something different.

▶PROS: Nifty 30 graphics; novel Al; addictive, challenging gameplay.

>CONS: Swooping camera requires better than average eyelmouse coordination; very frustrating at times.





Price: \$29.95
Minimum System
Requirements: Pentium 90,
Windows 95, 16MB RAM,
10MB hard-drive space,
DirectX 5.0-compatible
video card supporting
640x480 and 256 colors, 2x
CD-ROM, mouse, supports
DirectX 5.0-compatible
sound cards.

Macintosh: Power PC 90, System 7, 16M8 RAM, 10M8 hard-drive space, 640x480 and 256-color graphics, 2x CD-ROM mouse.

Multiplayer Support: None

Designer: Anark Game Studios

Publisher: Electronic Arts San Mateo CA (800) 245-4525 www.ea.com



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"USCP Chess is easy to use a maxingly strong opponent. Mi you would do in actual Univ

USCRChes in .

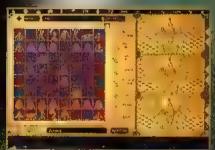
- The only chess program was call.
 Chess Rederation the language are
- The only chest program up be refriendly inter 300,000 move opening best literal and tittoric written by Tasc
- USCF Chess includes to offer in discount of membership in the USCF
- Adjustable computer AI speeds, ability levels LAN and modern play



Coming this November.













Bogglicious

Hasbro Adapts Another Classic for CD-ROM

by Charlotte Panther

re you looking for a way to spice up those monotonous family gatherings? Need to inject a little competitive energy into your workplace? Maybe you just want an outlet to show off your superior spelling skills? Whatever the reason,

himself instantly addicted to Hasbro's adaptation of the classic word game, BOOGLE

The game follows the same premise as the original Boggle: The idea is to find as many words as possible in a limited time-period by connecting letters diagonally, vertically, or horizontally across a grid of letters. This time, though, there are five variations on the classic theme from which to choose.

The first one, Classic
Boggle, plays exactly like the original
game. You can compete against up to
three other players, either by hotseat,
LAN, or Internet The latter two work
really well — all of the contestants are
able to work out their words concurreally, without worrying about which
words the other players are forming. At
the end of the round, the computer
subtracts any duplicate words from
players' lists and adds up the final score
to declare a winner

Hotseat should be the perfect way to play this game — four crazy people vying to come up with the best word. The fact that everyone crowds around one computer certainly adds to the atmosphere, but there is one major flaw. If you repeat a word that has already been used, both you and the originator of the word lose points. This would be fine in a situation

where you couldn't see your opponents making their moves, but it makes little sense in hotseat play, in which half the fun is screaming about what your rival nast did. If one player makes a particularly high-scoring word, there's nothing (short of blindfolding everyone) to stop the next player from reasing the same word and voiding both players' points.

Edit BATTLE BOGGLE Call top Charlets

1/07

2:46

3:52

1/07

70/5

70/5

50/10

AC/15

40/15

40/15

40/15

40/15

40/15

40/15

40/15

40/15

▶ GRISLY GRIDLOCK Placing the letters in the intended slot on the grid proves to be frustrating in Battle Boggle

MIND-BOGGLING

The four atternative versions of the game include *Breakaway Boggle*, which consists of a 4x4x4 cube that you can rotate to help create longer words. As you use each letter, it disappears, until words can no longer be made (or you run out of time).

In Your Face Boggle, one of the two single-player-only games, is best described as the wordsmith's TETRIS. The idea is to score as many words as possible as the clock counts down Every 20 to 30 seconds the blocks of letters creep one step closer toward you. The game ends when the letters are so close to you that they're... well—in your face

In Space Boggle, you form words by clicking on individual letters that float toward you like asteroids. Space Boggle shouts out for a multiplayer mode. This really would have been great as a fast-paced click-in round—sort of like YOU DON'T KNOW JACK's Jack Attack—a race to form the words before your opponent can.

Last, and, unfortunately, least, is Battle Boggle. In this two-player round, you and your opponent strategically

place individual letters onto a grid, in an order that allows for the most possible words to be created. The layout of the grid makes it frustratingly difficult to drop letters into their intended squares, and if you do misplace a letter, there is no undo feature

Camphically, BOCGLE is functional, rather than inspired, and lacks the pizzazz of some of Hasbro's earlier titles, such as SCRASBLE and RISK. Despite its foibles, though, this is still a better than average game — par-

ticularly when played multiplayer. It features a customizable dictionary, offers plenty of variety within each game-type, includes two levels of difficulty, and is devilishly addictive. Word-puzzle fans will not be disappointed.

DAPPEAL: Wordsmiths who want to expand (or show off) their vocabulary.

▶ PROS: Competitive multiplayer modes; good variation; customizable dictionary.

PGONS: Easy to cheat at Classic Boggie when

playing hotseat; two of the gametypes lack multiplayer mode; interface of Battle Boggle is frustrating.





Price: \$29.95 Minimum System Requirements: 486/66 (Pentrum 75 recommended), Windows 95, 12MB RAM, 11MB hard-drive space. SVGA graphics, 2x CD-ROM; supports Sound Blaster- or Windowscompatible sound card Multiplayer Support: Internet, LAN, or Hotseat (1-4 players) Publisher: Hasbro Interactive Beverly, MA (508) 921-3700 www.hashro.com

Bad Lands

Scorpia Gets Her Claws on LANDS OF LORE: GUARDIANS OF DESTINY, and She's Not Happy

ANDS OF LORE:
GUARDIANS OF DESTINY
is Westwood's longdelayed sequel to its popular adventure-RPG of
1994. It's the story of
Lather, son of Scotia,
whom we dispatched in
the first Lore. Luther
has several problems. For

one, he's cursed by random transformations into other forms. Without warning, he may become either a beast or a lizard. The beast form is slow, ponderous, and nonmagical. It is, however, a ferocious fighter of great power. The lizard form is small, weak, and not a fighting critter. On the other hand, it is extremely fast and can east magic spells. The problem is that Laither has no control over these forms, and he can morph into them at any time.

His other problem is that the Gladstone guards are after him to put him back in prison. As the game begins, I wiher has just made his escape and is on the run to

consult the Draracle about ridding himself of the curse. It will be a long and difficult trail before he is able to do that

SOLO MIO

GUARDIANS OF DESTINY is a singleperson, real-time, 3D game. There is no party of characters, nor does anyone join Luther, even temporarily. It's strictly a solo adventure

In the lower-right corner is a portrait of Luther, plus loons for your weapon and current spell, along with a blue but for mana and a red one for health. Clicking on the portrait brings up the inventory box, which displays everything you're carrying, as well as which weapons, armor, and miscellaneous items you have

At the top right of the inventory screen are four bars that measure your fighting strength and unnor protection. As your abilities improve over time, these bars become longer. Various equipped items can affect these stats,

making them better or worse. Clicking on the bars switches them with the level gain bars, one for magic and one for combat. All these stats are visual only—as in the first LANDS OF LORL, no actual numbers are used for strength, mana, or hit points.

Combat is a simple procedure.
Lather faces his foe, and you click either the weapon icon (to swing or shoot missiles) or the magic icon (to cast a spell). The spells come in sets of four, when Lather learns a spell, he gets the whole set at once. To cast a spell beyond the first, you can hit 2–4 on the number keys, or target the opponent with the mouse and hold the right mouse button until the desired spell is reached.

Conversation in the game is extremely limited. Typically, as Luther approaches someone with something to say, talking begins automatically. There are no choices to make; everything said by both parties is entirely prerecorded.

GUARDIANS has an excellent automap.

As usual, it fills in as you go along, and you can bring it up for viewing at any time with the Tab key Some important locations will be noted automatically on the map. Others you can mark with note "spikes." You can click on a placed spike to reread your notes or add to them, or both. You can zoom in very close on the map to view a section in detail, or zoom out to see the general layout; this is a very handy feature.

WILD GOOSE CHASE

And that, unfortunately, is about the last good thing I



For any RPG-starved gamer, this one is a disappointment beyond words.



Price: \$49.99
Minimum System
Requirements:
Pentum 75, Windows 95
or DOS 5.0, 16MB RAM
VGA/SVGA graphics
105MB hard-drive space,
4x CD-ROM drive, MSCEX
2.2, Microsoft-compatible
mouse; supports most
major sound cards.
Multiplayer Support:
None
Designer: Westwood
Studios

Publisher: Virgin Interactive Irvine, CA (714) 833-8750

Irvine, CA (714) 833-8710 www.westwood.com



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WINDOWS' 95 CD-ROM







SCORPIA

IDVENTURE/RP

have to say about G1 ARDIANS OF DESTINY As a game, it is a horror Everything that could be put in to drag the game out; send you through repetitious exercises, force you to run, jump, and leap excessively; and make your life difficult has been included.

For example, you have to obtain a silver leaf from a graveyard. Once there, you find an open building leading to underground crypts—the obvious starting point, since most of the other structures are locked. So you go below and eventually come across a room with a claw statuc and a glass bead. The connection is blatant, and you charge the bead. This opens a building upstairs, where you find more beads, which you charge to open more buildings for more heads, which you charge well, you get the idea.

Except, halfway through, you have to go to the Dracold Ruins (a sunken city), a place that you reach by jumping along a pit in the jungle. Once there, you look around until you find the second claw and charge a bead there, because the ones from the crypts won't do anymore. How are you supposed to know to do this? Perhaps, after fruitless hours in the graveyard, it will come to you by osmosis or something.

Anyway, you charge up the bead, return (happily, via teleporter) to the cemetery, and open another mausoleum, which controls another bead that opens into another section of the underground crypts. In this area, you find the third claw and charge up

WELL, THE MAP IS GOOD One of GUARDIANS OF DESTINY'S few redeeming features is a great, customizable automap.

two more beads to open up the last two buildings. Inside one structure, you talk to the ghost of a Dracoid Priest. That's if you found the item you need to do this in the Ruins, otherwise, you have to go back there again and find it, presuming that you realize this is necessary

The priest has a favor to ask of you: He wants you to go into the ruins and bring back his remains so be can rest in peace. You do that, but still have found no silver leaf. Instead, the priest directs you to have a chat with the ghost of the Dracoid Emperor. Among other things, you will need one bead charged at each of the three claws to reach fam.

The Emperor has a request, too: He wants you to bring his remains



ATTACK OF THE KILLER PIXELS Giant spiders are just one of the many creatures you'll face in GUARDIANS OF DESTINY

into the runs, so he can destroy the city once and for all. And guess what, you're pretty much forced to witness the big event, after which you have just moments to escape before you are drowned. You will likely drown several times before you figure out the exact sequences necessary to escape. This can't be avoided, as all other exits.

are blocked off, and you can't skip the video.

After all that, you can hike back to the graveyard, have a fund chat with the Emperor, and finally collect the silver leaf. And this is still fairly early in the game. Having fun yet?

PLATFORM FOLLIES

Here's another quick example of the game's



inanity. You go to the citadel of the Ruloi because they have the Dreamstone you need to raise the Ancient City To reach the stone, you have to leap up the side of a structure, from platform to ledge to platform, 42 innes. The jumps are actually easy, and not especially dangerous, but they all have to be done

At the top, you'll find our old friend from PAGAN, the disappearing bridge It's a timed min—and I do mean

run—to get across safely What's shipld about this is that the Rulot fly, People who fly everywhere in their home need jumping platforms and vanishing bridges the way a snake needs wheels.

The list could go on and on, but I don't have enough room, and you don't have enough time, for the whole catalog. Suffice it to say that Ibis is what you go through for much of the game, only

some of it is worse than the above example 'The basic rule for solving puzzles is thus. If the answer isn't bla-lantly obvious, then try the stupidest, most idiotic, fllogical, or outrageous thing you can think of — it will probably work.

ENDGAME, AT LAST

But enough of that, let's talk about the Big Event, the showdown with Behal, which is what this all leads up to.

It's very difficult, and very frustrating. It took me many tries to figure out the trick, and how to work it (That pool is important!) I was just glad I'd been lucky enough to have a supply of stone cubes with me at the time; without those, I don't know if it would have been possible to solve this puzzle



CHECK OUT MY STUFF You store goodies in the inventory stats above your character's head, and magic in the slots to the left

If you actually play and get this far, be sure to have some cubes with you

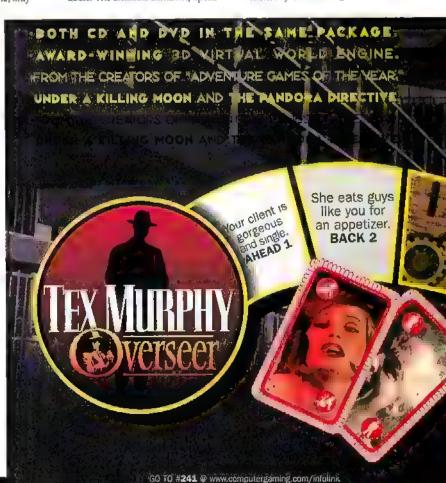
Finally, it was over Behal dropped to his knees and keeled over dead. My reaction was (among others), "It's about time" and I sat back for the ending sequences. Going by the earlier FMVs, it was sure to be something spectacular.

The scene changes to a hallway with doors. The Dramele comes in, opens

one, and looks in on a bedroom where Lather and Dawn are having a romp under the blankets I kid you not, this is the ending of the game. Not quite the type of climas we were expecting. This may be satisfying for Lather, but not for anyone who persevered to the end.

Overall, LANDS OF LORE: GUARDIANS OF DESTINY is a disaster from start to finish. It combines the worst

aspects of PACAN ("Mario the Avatar") and THUNDERSCAPI ("the game without end"), along with some of the most non-sensical "puzzles" since LEGEND OF KMANDIA L GUARDIANS is not an RPG nor an adventure nor an action game, but a patchwork of all three, and a threadbare one at that. For any RPG-starved gamer, this one is a disappointment beyond words.





GAMER'S EDGE

Your Source for Ruthless Strategies, Tips, Cheats, and Hacks

STRATEGY & TIPS

Jedi Knight

Eight Levels of Secrets to Help You Grow in The Force

by Thierry Nguyen

raining to be a Jedi can be hard work. After all, Luke had to lift boulders and confront his past to wield that lightsaber. Fortunately, your training doesn't have to be that gracting. Wittle JEDE KNIGHT doesn't formally acknowledge you as a student of The Force until Level Four, you can start developing your Force skills at the very beginning of the game Finding all the secrets in every level will cam you a Force star, so you can have a reserve of three Force stars before you earn your lightsaber

This month, we'll reveal the exact locations of all the secrets on disc one, which will earn you I3 Force stars.



BOXED IN This set of boxes hides the sixth secret area in Level One.

1: Double-Cross on Nar Shaddaa

Secret One: After passing the first fan, you'il be wilking down a hallway where you can see a Gran on a ledge to your right. Descend to the ledge, and then jump onto the slanted ramp next to the ledge. You'll then find yourself in a passage that will take you to the top of the fan.

Secret Two: Shortly after another fan, you'll find yourself on a bridge. Swing your head to the right, and you'll see a Gran on a ledge. Jump down to that ledge.

Secret Three: When you're ascending the first 45-degree lift, make a pit stop on the little alcove to the right

Secret Four: When you reach the bridge that the TTE Bomber flies over, turn around and walk back to the previous bridge. When

3: The Return Home to Sulon

Secret One: The secret is right behind the start location; turn around and shoot the dark wall.

Secret Two: On the hill that is on the left side of the house, there is another weak wall buried in the back. Shoot it.

Secret Three: Follow the plank down

where it collapses. When you kill the Tusken Raider, you should be near a weak wall. Shoot it.

Secret Four: When you reach the green area that requires the red key, go to the cave-in where Kyie utters a comment. Shoot the wall on the left. Secret Five: After opening the red door, make your way to the hall with the Tuskens and the cubbyhole. Go to the second cubbyhole and shoot the dark wall behind it.

Secret Six: When you dive into the waterfall, you can go up a ramp back to where you started. Along this ramp, there is a hidden alcove; use your field light to



START YER ENGINES! In this area, look straight down and search for the tiny ledge beneath you. Drop down to the first secret area of Level Two.

you reach the first bridge, turn right, and you should see four overhangs. Cross them.

Secret Five: When you open the passage to the room filled with eargo boxes, don't go down the ramp just yet. Stay in the room above, and look down onto the boxes. You'll notice that one stack has a space in it; jump down to that one stack and walk along the top to the other side. There, a hole to the secret awaits you.

Sacret Six: In the cargo room, before going through the door that leads to the shuttle hangar, turn around and go around the cargo boxes on the left. You should see a ramp that leads up to a small hall that ends at the last secret

2: The Lost Disk

Secret One: After making your way through the ventilation system, you'll walk down a hall where you can see a ship engine out the window Walk to the window that gives you a straight view of the engine, then look down. Jump to that liny little ledge

help you see inside.

Secret Seven: When you reach the acidic/electric water, jump into the first pool and turn around. Go in the alcove quickly and jump out.

Secret Eight: When you enter the mines, turn on your field light so that you can better see the light in the mines. Secret Two: After opening the door with the red keycard, you'll enter a room with a couple of boxes and a ramp leading up. Walk up the ramp, but jump onto the red box. From there, jump onto the ledge across from the box.

Secret Three: When navigating the three grant forks, you'll notice a ledge embedded in the side of a wall. That's the third secret.

Secret Four: When you reach another cargo room, scale the set of boxes on the left until

you reach the top, then jump to the opposite stack of boxes.

Secret Five: When you reach the room that has the two elevators with the conveyor belt between them, save, because this area is secret-rich. For Secret Five, take the first elevator and make your way to the window ledge on the right, which should lead to the underside of the conveyor belt.

Secret Six: Go up the second elevator, and along the way, jump into the area above the glowing red force field

Secret Seven: Take the second elevator again, but this time, get off at the ledge just below the elevator's destination; walking along the ledge is the seventh secret.

Secret Eight: Right before you make it to the rendezvous point, follow the ledge along the left wall. Follow this until you can jump to the ramp leading up to the final secret

4: The Jedi's Lightsaber 1

Socret One: When you've reached the flowing water, go against the current until you reach a grate; out it open with your lightsaber and pup late the first secret.

Secret Two: Follow the water and get onto the platform suspended above the water. Advance along the right path of the platform. You'll see a hole in the celling, which is the actual secret. To get there, you'll need to get a running start (or use Force Speed) and jump across the waterfall into the alcowe opposite you.

Secret Three: When going down the water ducts, you'll notice a hit of ground underneath the pipes.

Descend down into this area to find the third secret area.

Secret Four: After walking through Secret Three, you'll automatically pop into Secret Four,

Secret Five: When you much the water duct outside of the purification plant, don't go in it just yet. Jump onto the edge of a duct, get rid of the Tuskens, and you should spot a platform that has a hole in it. Make your way to the hole for this secret.

Secret Six: When you reach the

pool with the four water cycs, take the underwater tunnel to the last secret.





6: Into the Dark Palace

Secret: There's only one secret here. When you reach the rampe leading down into some water, flip on your field light. Go down into the water, but instead of going straight, take a left turn, going down even further. You'll surface in a room with a

hole in the upper corners; going into that hole will not you a rail yun and the sole secret in this level.



7: Yun—The Dark Youth

Since this is a duel, there are no secrets on this level. Good luck taking him down.

8: Palace Escape

Secret One:

When the elevator at the begunning goes all the way down, step off and follow the left side of the room. You'll find a little passage on the left for the first secret



THAT ACID SURE STINGS Jump into this acid pool in Level Three, enter this secret area, and then quickly hop out.

Secret Two:

When you enter the ventilation shaft, there is a section of cracked floor, between the two entrances. Shoot this cracked floor.

Secret Three: In the ventilation shaft, before you reach the grate leading outward, there's a weak wall on the left side. Shoot II

Secret Four: When you reach the first wind tunnel, go in it and allow yourself to be blown upward. You should see a small cubbyhole, which you can enter with a carefully timed pamp.

Secret Five: When you use the wind tunnel to propel yourself across a chasm, creep alongside the ledge near your destination. The ledge continues to the other side of the building, where there is a grille on a wall, Chop It down with your lightsaber.

If you've made it this far, you've escaped Jeree's Tower, and can now pursue \$188 to the Fire! Station. Next month, we'll reveal the secrets in the rest of the levels, and we'll school you in the ways of The Force. You'll need all the help you can get to defeat Jeree and his disciples, whether you lean to the Light Side or the Dark Side of The Force.

5: Baron's Hed: The Fallen City

Special line in the content of the pool in the tory beginning of the level in the tunnel leading down to this secret.

Characteristic first haliding year enter in the city, take the stairs to the recen on the left. Here a thorneal detering on the eracked wall.

Macini-Phone: A little beyond the little beings in a building with an anning on the short behind the counter is another circles well-which you can blew anny with a thermal determine.

Book Four in the courtyant, you'll some board propped up against the door Move the board out of the way and go into the little alcove.

Mount First When you make your vary to the top of the main heliding, up through the window into the loss. Make your way anto the otage, and then use your thornest delanator again on another pracked well.

House Six After traversing the roofleps to get around the barrier con rounding feroe's flower, you'll run into two rounes with a chair on these the min

in the range is a door into the parcel; which is door.

Income the life of your perfectly time in price-Speed entranced.

UP, UP, AND AWAY This ramp into Level Five's sixth secret area is hard to scale, as it requires a well-timed jump and a bit of Force Speed.



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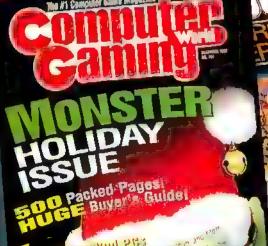
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GAIVIER'S EDGE

STRATEGY & TIPS

Fallout

A Quest Guide for the Fearless Mutant Killer

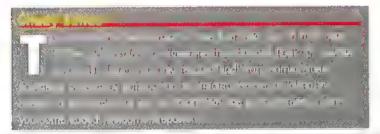
by Petra Schlunk

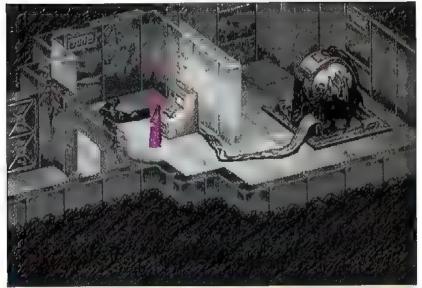
he good news for gamers is that Interplay's

FALLOUT provides a great role-playing experience, with choices and solutions to quests that are consistent with how you wish to play. The bad news is that the wide breadth of options makes it impossible for one article to cover all solutions for all the quests. Instead, we'll look at the major quests and some others that often stump players. There are many spoilers; so be careful not to peek unless you really need the help.

Vault 15

Stop in Shady Sands before going here and get some rope from Seth. Use the rope to repair an elevator at the vault. Find more rope in





SAY YOUR PRAYERS This computer activates a nuclear warhead to blow up the Cathedral

the vanilt and repair the second elevator. On the last level, go to the southeast corner and discover you can't reach the water chip. Doh!

Junktown

After you help get rid of Killian's would-be assassin, you can help the shenff get Cazmo. Either plant the bug on Cazmo using the steal skill or wear the wiretap while you agree to kill the sheriff for him. Then return to Killian. To bust the Skulz, the most reliable way (accessible to all characters) is to watch a fight in the Skum Pitt and then talk to the Skulz and steal an irm to join them. After they tell you about their plans to kill Neal, talk to Lass.

The Hub

There are lots of quests in this little town, and most have obvious solutions. Definitely talk to Butch at Far Go'linders and agree to investigate the missing caravans. Then, speak with Rutger and Beth and visit Harold and Slappy in Old'lown. Go to the deathclaw cave, kill the deathclaw (this is tough), and get the holodisk from the dying mutant.

Visit the Water Merchants to learn where to find a water chip-Necropolis. While you are here, you can also gain a hundred days for your water-chip quest.

Necropolis

Hop into the sewers and find the underground ghoul leader. Go north and leave the sewers to reach the Water. Shed. Recuter the sewers using the manholes on the street to find the missing part (junk) of the water pump. To reach the water pump and the water chip, you'll have to make it past some mutants. You can fool them, fight them, or get past them by other means. Fix the water pump by using the junk on it. Enter the sewers in the same building to find the water chip.

Vault 13

Give the water chip to the Overseer. You'll get your second objective: Get nd of the mutants' source! If you return to the vault before getting the water chip, calm the rebellion by talking with Teresa or by using force at her 5:00 meetings. You can catch a water thief by hanging out in the supply room around midnight.

GANIER'S EDGE



THAT'S MY MOMMA These stairs lead down to the mother deathclaw in the Boneyard. Kill then

MORE POWER TO YA Fix these generators and use the computer nearby to turn on the main power in the Glow.



The Glow

Agree to the Brotherhood's initiate quest. Take three or four Rad-X pills, several Rad-Aways, rope, and a Geiger counter along to the Glow. Stop just before reaching the Glow and pop a couple Rad-X's. Use the rope on a beam by the crater to enter. Don't dawdle; your Rad-X's won't last forever and you can die if you get too radiated. Search the bodies on the first level to find a yellow key and the Brotherhood's holodisk.

Deactivate the elevator traps using colorcoded keys you find. On Level Six, repair the generator by the computer and turn on the main power so you can go to Level Five.

Save before leaving. If you are senously radiated, take some Rad/ways before leaving. If you get sick, take more and keep going.

Brotherhood

Take the disk from the Clow to the Brotherhood, Perform a quest for Takes or fix

The Bonevard

claw quest, you must kill the metior deathclaw and her eggs; find the
extract of the secretarists a man belief
fix his farm, find the needed part on a
body or the man area of the manufacture
area. It you being him to secretariate
can do wonders with power armer and
plasma rifles.

From North Law (

officer the Addition)

Base of the

Cathories the com
figure held the com
picte the caree.

some armor in the repair shop to get Power Armor. Talk to General Maxson and the elders to get a quest to scout for a military base

Military Base

The Military Base is far north and a bit west from the Brotherhood. There are several ways to get past the guards outside. Regardless of your method, you need a bolodisk from the guard at the door to enter. To temporarily disrupt the vellow force fields, use explosives or "repair" their emitters. Or, back into the computer on the east side of the first floor. Use science and then a radio on the computer to create something that will toggle the force fields.

On the third level, kill the prison guard or let him take you to his leader. If you go with him, kill the leader and his friends. Retneve a decryption holodisk from the leader and a strange-looking key from a locker nearby. On the fourth floor, get past the last force field with explosives or by using Mr. Handy (after fixing him). Save your game. Access the computer and try to hack the security codes. Set the self-destruct for 300 seconds. Run like hell.

Cathedral

If you haven't recruited any Followers, you can sneak around here wearing a purple

The state of the s

FREAK SHOW. The brains behind the mutants

eloak. Unlock the <mark>door to the stairs (Laura</mark> can unlock this if you've talked to the Follower's leader).

Go up and kill Morpheus. Get his black key and purple cloak if you don't have one yet. Go downstairs and open the door at the back (use the black key or pick the lock). In the basement, you may find a door you can't open from this side; wait for sumeone to open it. If you want to meet the Moster, first get a psychic millifier from a prisoner in the northwest of the second level.

On the third floor you have two choices Go east to meet the Master and then run out of the Cathedral and off the grid before it blows up; or, go west through some locked doors to an elevator leading to a nuclear warhend. Activate the nuke using science or the stange key from the military base. Then heaf it out of there

Once you've killed the Master and destroyed the Military Base, you've completed the game. Sit back and see how well you did saving the world. §

Got Skills

ing skills are quite important or useful: small guns (early in the game); energy meapons (for inter); lockpick; and, sucenderly, speech, science, and repair. You will find several backs for improving science and repair, so there is little need to tag these skills. STRATEGY & TIP

Abe's Oddysee

An Abbreviated Mudokon's Handbook

by Rusel DeMaria

aking Abe, the hero of ABE'S ODDYSEE, through his escape and return to Rupture Farms is no easy task. Every few screens you'll encounter a new puzzle or situation, some of which will take as much brain as twitch to solve You don't have to tackle the tougher ones, but if you want to get the best ending in the game, you'll need to find a lot of the game's trickiest secret areas and save a lot of Mudokons.

Escape from Rupture Farms

Before I lead you to the secret areas and captured

SEE THE CGW

Mindokons, you need to know how to identify screens in the game. When you press the pause key, you'll see a list of options. At the bottom of the screen is an alphanumerie code (for example, RIP02C03) Breaking this down, we get RI, which is the area of the game you're in, Pxx is the section you're in,

and Cax is the specific screen. I will use these screen designations to identify places in the game throughout the rest of this article.

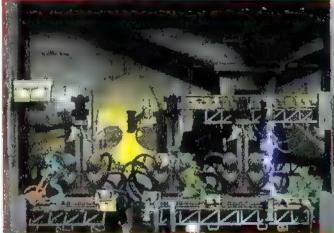
Finding secret areas is not usually difficult, although a few are very well hidden, Looking behind barrels and under trapdoors is a good het. In fact, in the very first screen of the game (RIPI5C01), there's a secret. Lower Abe behind the barrel to enter it. Here are some basic instructions for completing this first secret area

R1P15C15: Jump from the ledge to the lower path, then lower yourself to the screen below.

R1P15C16: Sneak to within one step of the edge of the platform you're on, Jamp and remain in a hanging position until the Slig walks

off his platform, then hoist yourself up. Pull the lever to make the Shg fall into the trapdoor and return to the previous screen

R1P15C15: Walk under the left-hand saw. Pull the lever to turn off the electricity and return under the saw again. Tell the first Mudokon to follow you. To get him to jump off the ledge, tell him to follow again



while standing on the opposite side of the gap. Pull the right hand lever to change the cycle Bulle for more time (BSE) (BESS) and foliation diffragive of the electricity.

of the saws and the electrical barriers, and bring the second Mudokon under the first saw. Pull the lever again, and then take him under the second saw and down to the next screen. Follow the Mudokon down

R1P15C16: Chant to free all three Mudokons. Then return to the top and climb to the main path again (R1P15C01)

Now that you've completed the first secret area and saved three Mudokons, you're well on your way. You'll also find secret areas in R1P15C03, R1P15C04, R1P15C06, and R1P16C03. To find some areas, you must open a trapdoor and run in while it is still open There is one last secret area in the first part of the game. To find it, you must make your way onto the Slig's platform in R1P20C03

There are some tricks to completing the secret area in R1P15C04. The Security Orb prevents you from chanting, but if you just blow it up you shouldn't have a problem

The Stockyards

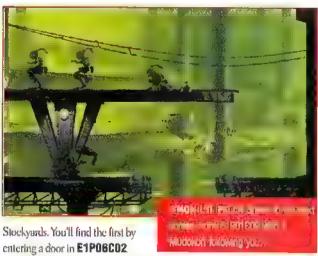
Let's move to the next section of the game: the Stockyards. Want to play the game perfectly? Don't miss the hidden Mudokon m E1P06C01.

You'll find six secret areas in the

NOMES ANNY-Thronsosoromic to blow an hin Security College and textus ments were in crean R1P15004



GAMER'S EDGE



The keys to secret areas in **E1P01C02** and **E1P01C03** are sneaking and hiding in the shadows.

In **E1P01C05**, there's a secret area. This one is pretty hard, so I'll give you some tips on how to complete it. When you chant and enter the gate, you'll appear in **£1P01C08**.

E1P01C08: As soon as you appear, jump and remain hanging on the ledge ahead. Wast until the bottom Shg has started to walk away, then sneak behind him to the next screen

E1P01C09: This is tricky Yor, have to sneak behind the Slag, then, at the last moment, run and jump across the gap. You

need to take off in your gamp a little early so that you land in a hanging position instead of all the way across. Remain hanging until both Sligs have left the screen. Quickly jump onto the upper path and run to the left. Stop before you enter the next screen and start sneaking.

If your timing is really good, you can say "Hello" to one of the Mudokons and tell him to follow you before moving to the next screen.

E1P01C08: Now sneak to the narrow shadow area and stop there. From here, it's a matter of getting both Mixdokons to follow you to the shadow and telling them to wait

SNEAK AND SNATCH Process the Site above in 1920 to the mister that from the State and the army.

Slig there
There's no way to finish this area quickly, su
you'll have to be patient.

(when the Slig

is gone). Pinally,

set the bomb

when the Slig

isn't looking and

wait for him to

blow up. Then

find your way to

without gelling

blasted by the

sately on the

lower path

free the two Mudokons and

Moving on, you'll arrive at another tricky secret area. This one has two entrances, and for the best results, you'll want to use both of them.

E1P02C01: Climb carefully down the cliff face, avoiding the bats. Drop to the screen below,

E1P02C05: When you land, the sleeping Shg will wake up and walk away. Jump the gap and follow him to the next screen

Run/jump to the high platform and chant manedutely to open the gate. Then, when the Slig goes away again, jump down and through the gate. Possess the Slig in E1P02C10 and take him down to E1P02C08. Make the Slig shout "Look out!" in order to cause the Mudokons to duck, then shoot the Sligs there. Destroy the Slig and climb down to E1P02C08 and release the two Mudokons. Walk to the left and chant to open the exit gate. Jump through and return to the Stockyards.

But want! There are two Mudokons still back there. You'll need to go back, but first make your way to **E1P02C03** and get the rocks from the sack on the lower path

From **E1P02C03**, climb down to **E1P02C02**, chant, and then return to the secret area.

Make your way to the bottom path in **E1PO2COB** Stand about one step to either side of the name on the upper path and throw a week, holding the direction key in the opposite direction from the one you're facing. This makes the rock go almost straight up. It will detonate the mane.

Now you can get each of the remaining Mudokons and lead them to the bottom path in **E1P02C08**, where you can set them free That's it. Return to **E1P02C07** and use the exit gate

That's all the room we have for AMC'S OFFINESS tips, but visit our Web site at www.computergaming.com for even more cool hints, including more secret area walkthroughs and special control tips.

Rusel DeMaria, CGW's online editor-ullarge, is a game designer and strategy book author. He wrote Prima Publishing's Abe's Oddysee: The Official Strategy Guide. §



STRATEGY & TIPS

Age of Empires

Be the First to Enter the Iron Age and Dominate Your Opponents

by Elliott Chin



GE OF EMPIRES is a wonderful game that has grabbed us as few games have. Although it certainly has its fair share of problems, there is no denying its addictive and fun gamepley. The game is at its best, though, when you are winning. And winning really isn't that difficult if you follow the strategies in

this guide. My strategies definitely aren't the only approaches to victory, but they work con-

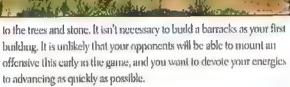
vincingly for me when I compete with my fellow editors. There is a lot to cover, so this month, I'll explore how to get started and how to advance to each age as quickly as possible. I'll also provide a few more general tips. Next month, I'll let you in on more military strategies—including how, when, and where to fight as well as tips on how to protect your Wonder and what to do if your enemy has you on the ropes.

Age Advancement

Once you've specified scenario parameters, it's time to start building an empire. Let's assume you all start in the Stone Age. The key is to advance through the ages as quickly as possible

Stone Age: First, have one villager build two houses, send the other villagers to find wood and food, and start cranking out half a dozen villagers. You should have a population of 8-10 and have two of them chopping wood and the rest gathering food. Make sure you build your granary next to the berry bushes, and your storage pit next

cLOSER To ensure the fastest resource gethering, build granaries and storage pits near resource deposits to cut down on the distance villagers need to travel to deposit their loads.



If you are playing on an island map, build a granary and dock first.

Build two fishing boats to supplement your work force and start fishing.

Pick Your Fights

he first thing to do when playing Age of Empires with others is to decide the game parameters. Some gamers like the full tech-tree option because it allows you the breadth of the game's research and building options. However, this option eliminates all racial bonuses, and really takes some of the strategy out of the game.

The next major considerations are the

size and land-to-sea ratio of the map. These two factors will define your strategies for the entire game. Choosing either huge or large maps will allow you to build in relative peace, far away from potential enemies, and will offer many resources. Smaller maps will start you closer to your enemies, which translates to more frequent enemy engagements and less pientiful resources. If you like

the luxury of building, choose large maps. If you want to eliminate your enemies quickly with military forces, pick a small map

Island scenarios might seem like a good starting map for beginners, but that isn't the case, It's harder to reach your opponent on an island map, which might seem like a benefit for beginners who want to escape detection. However,



By building boats to gather food, you won't have to divert food to build villagers.

If you concentrate on food, you should have the necessary stockpile in under 10 minutes to advance to the Tool Age.

Tool Age: Once in the Tool Age, it's time to beef up your infaistructure. Immediately build a market and a stable You'll probably need to have two villagers stop foraging and start chopping wood, for a total of four woodcutters. Once the market is finished, have the remaining foragers build farms. You should have 6-9 farms. It's important to not build haphazardly. You need to construct an efficient town that minumizes the distance a villager has to walk from a farm to a granary. Farmers deposit their food in a granary or town center, so ring either building with farms, building them one or two files apart from each other and the depository.

During the Tool Age, you want to build

two to three more houses and start cranking out a dozen more villagers to start gathering wood, stone, and gold. At this bruc, food should still be your first priority among resources, with wood, stone, and gold following, respectively. Even as you concentrate on your economy, it's essential now to build scouls and explore the land. Not only do you want to gain the most points for exploration, but you also want to find out where your opponents are and keep tabs on their progress. Scouts also help alert you when an enemy approaches.

At the same time you are sconting, you should be researching walls and towers at the granary. I wouldn't recommend spending food on many troops at this juncture of the game, so towers make the most sense for providing protection for your building empire. Place towers next to all your resource-rich areas to protect your resources and villagers.

If you are playing with experts, they will find a way onto your island. In contrast, it will be hard for you to mount a sea offense and transport troops to an expert enemy's island, something you may have to do if he builds a Wonder. My advice is to keep things simple for beginners and play with inland maps. Assuming equal skill among all opponents, though, inland maps are best for those players who want to attack early.

Lastly, know your opponent and adjust your strategies accordingly. If you know that your human opponents like to play defensively and build huge economies, attack them early and cripple their empire during the Bronze or Tool Age. This will surprise and thwart them. If they play offensively, and attack early, then you will have to build towers early and keep a few infantry handy even during the Tool Age.

Ion 10 Tos

Found is vital to advancing through ather ages, so make it your economic printity. In the Score, Age, 12 percent of your villagers should gather feed while the rest gather wood, in subsequent ages make sure you have at least six fames joine is optimal).

Build scouts or scoutships early, an example of the fool Age. You want to explore the map, not only for points, but also to find out where your opponents are

while, but not at the expense of age advancement. Usually it's best to upgrade weapons and arreor for enly year meat plentiful unit type, saving the rest of the food for advancement. Once yeu hit the Bronze Age, yeu can start to upgrade yeur units more frequently.

Engage year exponents early, to not accreate a hig army and attack instead, create small skirmish ferces of three to four units (proferably swift cavalry), and harass enemy camps on a regular basis. You'll not only increase your points by racking up kills, you'll also gauge your opponent's military strength, set him back. Thus in production by killing his viriagers, and force him to divert resources and villagers away from age advancement to military entense.

H you chose not to attack early, at a linest trainfant abequate blackers in that you don't get overrue. Build towers to protect your vital researce areas, and wall off your settlement. Begin these defensive maneuvers as early as the Tool Age. As with all things, you need to exercise discretion so you don't divert too many farmers to stone mining.

Check the achievement tab frequent of the second of the second to sec where you need to impreve your points. If you find yourself lesing points in economy because

GAMER'S EDGE

year means has two entages high person was care just means around records elegants to start the perjoration because many you need to employ as the person was present to many you need to employ as the person was present. Not easy with your persons well more intelligence, respectively. Checking the perjoration to your point deficiencies will help you and hurs the game's current leader.

Take acceptance were controlled assuming that you have smart apponents, speed becomes the deciding factor in determining who wins the game and who lesses. Use waypoints and assign numbers to your troops for better coordination, and use the less keep to provide the less k

best to have the military buildings on the working a year from the hard point of the working a year from the hard of the hard

When you build structures, assign additional villagers to the task to speed up the construction. Two villagers will build twice as fast, three will build these times as fast, and so on.

Times wards: Food, food, locd.



INTO THE UNKNOWN Knowledge is power, so scout early to explore the map and find your opponents, and check the achievements to keep tabs on them.



HARASS 'EM Even though it will slow your advancement schedule, you should hansse your enemies during the Bronze Age to stunt their progress.

It might seem difficult to conduct all these actions at the same time, but during hills in the game, such as when you are waiting for villagers to finish building towers, you can upgrade your weapons at the storage pit and your villagers at the market. Don't get too upgrade-happy because you don't want to drain your food surplus too much and delay advancement to the Bronze Age. I recommend researching woodworking for better wood-gathering, tool-working, and armor for your scouts

During the Tool Age, you simply want to amuss enough food to advance yet another age. For both ages, your strategy should still be very food-oriented, meaning that you must concentrate on stockpiling food for eventual advancement to the Bronze Age.

Bronze Age: Once you hit the Bronze Age, you shouldn't relax your pace of farming, but you should balance your focus.

During the Branze Age, if you haven't adjusted your work force, you should have about 20 villagers, with nine farming, and the rest split evenly among gathering gold, wood, and stone. You might want to build a few more villagers and apply them to goldmining so you can advance to the Iron Age quickly.

Build a minimum of buildings again, so you don't have to divert villagers away from food and gold gathering to cut wood. I recommend building the Covernment Center and officer a Temple or an Academy.



OUR EMPIRE'S MONUMENT On huge and large maps it's easiest to win with a Wonder.

Assign your entire workforce to the effort and you'll have it built quickly:

During this age, it's important to begin upgrading more frequently, starting with Market upgrades, like gold mining, stone mining, domestication, plow, whicel, and artisanship. You also want to upgrade your units at the Storage Pit in anticipation of either offensive maneuvers or defensive commitments.

During this age, different players will begin to manifest different strategies. Defensive players will now want to wall off their entire empire and crank out villagers to maximize resource gathering for the Iron Age and eventual Wonder building. Offensive players will shift their focus to the military and start building troops to harass the enemy

If you choose to remain defensive and continue on the economic route, you will advance quickly, but you can bet your enemies will also be entering the Bronze or Iron Age soon. My strategy, rather than allowing my enemies to match my pace, is to go on the offensive and hartiss them to slow their progress, while beefing up my villager production to compensate for the war effort. If you embark on the harassment strategy, you obviously won't advance as swiftly as you would have if you remained isolated. However, the trade-off is worth it, since you will set your opponent back.

Whatever your focus, though, don't lose sight of the Iron Age.

Whoever advances first to this last age will maintain the advantage

Iron Age: Finally, you've reached the pinnacle of civilization, Don't let up. If you don't have 12 houses by now, make sure you build them. Then, make sure you have a villager population approaching 30. You can now relax your food production and apply your villagers as needed

Build the rest of the Bronze and from Age buildings, and spread your villagers evenly among wood, stone, food, and gold. If you want to build a Wonder, divert half your farmers and add them evenly to the work forces gathering wood, stone, and gold. Once you start building your Wonder, devote your entire work force to the effort. It will significantly speed up the piecess.

If you choose a military route to victory, delete whatever villagers you need to make room for troops.

Whether you attempt to achieve victory militarily or economically, your previous efforts will be the key. Always maintain the strongest infrastructure possible, and victory will follow:



Understanding Emerable provided us with two tables that show how fast villagers will work at their given tasks, as well as how technological discoveries will modify their work rate. Villager Base Work Rate This table shows how many resource units a villager mathers per second, as well as the base carry capacity without any upgrades. Unit Work Rare Steed Carry Capacity Discovery Modifiers Articou #2 to lumberjack carry capacity. +0.20 to lumberjack work rate Babylonlan Cly. +3 to stone miner carry capacity. →+0.30 to stone miner work rate Coinage +0.25 gold to all gold gathered (i.e. gathering 10 gold would: "create" 12.5 gold) - # Craffsmanshla +2 to lumberjack carry capacity, +0.20 to lumberlack work rate Egyptian Cir. +2 to gold miner carry capacity, +0.20 to gold miner work rate: • Fishing Ship Upgrade. #5 to fishing boat carry capacity Bald Mining ... +3 to gold miner carry capacity. +0.30 to gold miner work rate: 8:0 to all villager carrying capacities: Porslan Civ. +3 to hunter carry capacity. +0.30 to hunter work rate Phoenician Civ. +3 to lumberjack carry capacity. +0.30 to lumberjack work rate-Sienegraft +3 to stone miner carry capacity, +0.30 to stone miner work rate. Stone Mining. +3 to stone miner carry capacity; +0.30 to stone miner work rate --+2 to lumberjack carry capacity; Woodworking +0.20 to lumberjack work rate-

BURATEGY & TIPS

Total Annihilation

A Guide to Full Metal Mayhem

by Martin E. Cirulis

t's been a long time since any wargame — turn-based or real-time — has offered the tactical and strategic choices that confront you during an average game of TOTAL ANN, HILATION, There are dozens of units and

defensive installations from which to choose, and each of them has its own strengths and weaknesses

I could fill half of this magazine with tactical analysis of the ground vehicles alone. Instead, I'll concentrate on some helpful initial tricks and tactics, along with some of the best and worst building choices available.

While it still takes a lot of practice to make you a master of TOTAL ANNIHLATION, the advice

and observations presented here should give you an advantage, not only in the single-player campaigns, but also in Net games with your fellow gamers.

Since the CORE and ARM have an abundance of analogous units with similar, if not identical, firepower, most references here are to types of vehicles (for instance, ampliabious tank means both the ARM Triton and the CORE Crock).



TWO UNITS ARE BETTER THAN ONE Two construction units can combine their efforts to build faster, a crucial tactio when setting up your base.

Success Begins at Home

As with most real-time games, it's hard to carve a victory out of the chaos of TOTAL ANNIHITATION if you don't spend some time and thought building the near-perfect base. Your initial concerns should almost always be resources and defense

Build two or three solar plants, followed by mines on any metal site within safe reach. While the temptation to wander far afield scouting for

The Losers

excellent units, and by the time you read this, the kids at Cavedog may have whipped up a few new winners. Not every idea, though, works out in the game as well as it does on paper. We've taken the

liberty of cointing out some of the less feasible units in the game, so you won't have to waste precious time and resources finding out the hard way.

Crawling Bemiss: These turkeys are more dangerous to you than to your opponent. Dreadfully slow and easily killed, they haven't a hope in

Hades of catching an opponent unawares. There's a small chance you could sneak a few under the cover of a radar jammer when an opponent is busy fighting on another front, but the odds are against it.

Amphibious Tanks: This idea looks great on paper, but once again, slow and plodding is a

GAMER'S EDGE

more metal may be strong, try and avoid it until your defenses have been built up, as nothing attracts unwanted enemy attention like a premature scouting mission. Since energy is so vital in the production of the strongest units and fortifications, you might want to consider building an energy storage bin alongside your initial solar collectors, in order to save up as much of that early energy surphis as possible. Once you have a trickle of power and metal coming in, you can throw up your first factory: Producing either Kbots or vehicles is good, although the Khot factory wins out if you expect air patrols fairly soon or if the terrain makes ground vehicles slow, easy targets.

Your imital defensive setup depends on whether you are fighting the computer or your fellow bloodthirsty humans. In games versus the computer, the early danger is almost always from aircraft, so quickly get that initial Khot factory built and start pumping out those light antiaircraft mechs. Don't bother with the slow-turning laser

towers unless you have good reason to believe you will have enemy ground forces in to hinch—the light laser towers are too ineffectual against fast scout or fighter aircraft to warrant early deployment. On the other hand, the greatest danger from human opponents is a quick burn rush, usually of light Khots. In this instance, one or two light laser towers can be a lifesaver, so throw them up as soon as your initial power and metal production is established. In sea games, any static defense should be close to the shoreline. This will serve as a last-ditch punch, should your sea-based defenses go down



HIGH GROUND With Total. Annihilation's enhanced terrain realism, it is essential to capture the high ground and fortify your position there.



THE HIGH SEAS For naval defenses, keep your towers close to share in case the enemy gats through your shore defense vessels

While I realize that space in which to build is at a premium on most maps, try to avoid the temptation to place your power production (or mines on CORE prime maps) in thee tight bunches, as those make delightful targets for hombers. Try to arrange your structures in a loose jumble that not only allows for easy passage of combat units, but also makes those long homber rims as non-optimal as possible.

One final construction tip is to make sore you have maltiple radars up and running (with overlapping fields). The worst thing that can happen is to be blinded by a surgicul austrike right before a big enemy rush By the time you put up another tower at could be all over.

One if by Land

Land warfare in TOTAL

ANNITION is fast and bloody, and victory usually goes to be who applies the most concentrated firepower while making his own units difficult largets. As you play this game, the use of mobile artiflery and screens of beavy units becomes obvious (the CORE Can is the best screening unit money and metal can buy), but one

lesson you need to learn early is to seize the high ground—and know what to do with it once you have it.

As in real life, most battles for high ground, no matter how fierce, are worth the price. This is true whether you really need the base, or if the battle is simply serving to the down enemy forces while you get to work someplace else. If you do manage to seize the hill, your first task is to fortify it. If you have the time to keep a close eye on things, send in your Commander (he is very vulnerable on hilltops, so if he starts to take fire, immediately yank him down the safe side of the hill) to put up the first

recipe for disaster in this game. The reality is that these units are underwater sitting ducks for any enemy with torpedo or depth charge capability. One sub-or torpedo launcher can destroy a half-dozen amphibious tanks as they crawl by. Use only if you have complete sea superiority and your opponent's air

defenses are just too strong for you to obliterate him the easy way.

Aircraft Carriers: These monstrosities are a floating metal-donation waiting to be delivered to your opponent. Since aircraft have unlimited range, and can patrol open oceanindefinitely, there is little reason to provide them with a large, under gunned, and vulnerable platform from which to operate. The aircraft repair ability is nice, but in contested airspace, your jets will usually be blasted to bits the moment they slow down to land. Build them only if you really, really need the supplemental radar and power abilities, and then keep them surrounded by subs.

GAMER'S EDGE



AMBUSH Hiding a gun tower against the back of a hillside protects it from air attack and allows you to ambush enemy units.

light laser towers. As you do this, make sure to anchor either side of the bill with a piece or two of heavy amor and an artiflery piece. Once you finish your initial fortifications, bring up a construction Kbot to put up a missile tower or two and a heavy laser tower to spit denth on approaching bombers and ground units. At the same time, you should be building a heavy plasma emplacement well behind the full to rain down deadly fire on the other side (without clipping the top of the bill). Test this using mobile artillery first.

A wise commander will use his transport aircraft to bring construction vehicles and artillery up on unassailable mesas. The sharp claffs mean you won't be able to fire on nearby units, but high towers make for great long-range bombardment and deadly air defense.

Two if by Sea

TOTAL ANNIHITATION was careful to make naval conflict almost as difficult and expen-

sive as it is in real life. With the exception of scout ships (you should always have at least a half-dozen of these on hand for antiaireraft and harassment purposes), the metal and energy cost of even mediocre naval units means a haphazard commitment of forces is fatal unless you have an absolutely incredible infrastructure

The submanne is your best friend—and greatest enemy. Build subs in droves until you have achieved sea superiority, and only then start to worry about bombardment monsters like cruisers and battleships. To be



SUBMERGED An unprotected capital ship is just dog meat to a sub wolf pack.

honest, the Level 2 subs are not that much of an improvement, given their cost. When in doubt, stick to the initial Larker and Snake units. If you have long-range radar, massle ships come to the forefront as an excellent long-range bombardment platform. Just make sure to guard them well behind a subscreen and a couple of patrolling lighters. While computer opponents may shrug off an

> occasional masale fail, human opponents tend to get annoyed and look to sink the offender annectiately with subs and bombers.

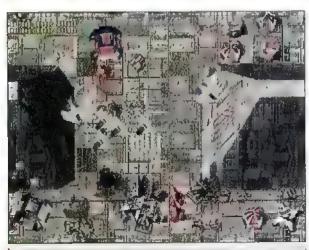
Don't neglect your sonar buoys. They are crueial in screening enemy subsibefore they get close enough to your capital ships and construction yards to do damage. §

And Just Panic If by Air

n this game, a well-coordinated air strike, especially early on, can win the war all by itself. While most opponents will be wise enough to set up fierce defenses consisting of missile/laser towers, AA Bots, missile tanks, and fighter CAP (especially CORE players, whose fighters have the edge in maneuvarability), if you have the time, you can construct an airborne hammer and anvillent can crush even the best base.

You prepare the hammer by first buildIng your sacrificial distraction flight of
recon aircraft. Fly your bombers out in
groups of two or three to safe spots
away from the enemy base, far enough
away from each other to create several
attack vectors when they come in. Sendup your fighters to orbit just outside
enemy AA range to try to draw off
enemy CAP before the attack. The tricky
part is keeping all of these groups on
separete Ctrl keys, so you can take control and redirect them quickly. This will
be the arwil.

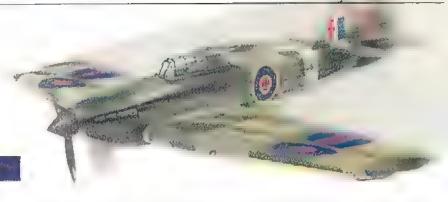
The hammer is composed of four to six gunships, all waiting on the deck for the attack to begin. When your initial? bomber rush-with fighter cover and decoy acreen of recon planes-begins its first pass, take control of your gunships and hit the enemy base hard and fast; Hose down every defense tower in sight; one after another, with the gunships incredible firepower. With a lot of skill and a bit of luck, you can ravage the enemy base defenses before your bombers come back for a second pass. Once the big guns are down, use your remaining gunships to destroy anything under construction before moving onto the construction facilities themselvess Even if your big air strike is eventually. destroyed, the damage it does will leave things wide open for your ground. units-which are now rushing forward, because you are a tactical genius;



HAMMER TIME If you can handle control of multiple air-strike forces and coordinate a simultaneous attack, you can claim a swift victory.







Strategy/Wargames

ACHTUNG SPITFIRE

An arcraft's ability to turn is closely related to its auspeed: I'ly too fast or too slow and furn rate suffers. Unfortunately, the "snap turn" statistics shown in the ACHTENC SPITTIRE alreraft database give no indication



Even the early-model Spitfires could turn on an aerial dime.

of this relationship between speed and turn performance.

Knowing a plane's corner speed, the speed at which its turn rate is maximized, is much more useful in a doglight. The following table lists the corner speeds for all fighters included in the game. Where two numbers are shown, the first is the lowest speed at which the plane

can pull 6gs, and the second is the minimum speed for 8gs. "Max" means corner speed is higher than the plane's maximum level-speed at the given altitude.

It is usually wise to slay near corner speed in a turning fight, but be aware that not one of these planes is powerful enough to maintain a maximum rate turn in level flight without decelerating. Unless your plane is blessed with a high thrust-to-weight ratio coupled with a low "sustained turn drag" rating, save that high-g potential for when you really need it. Robin Kim

Airplana Model	Corner Speed © 5,000 ft. (mph)	Cerner Speed	Corner Speel @ 25,000 ft (mph)
Spitfire I, II, or V	200/250	250	300/Max
Sp thre 1X	200	250	300/350
Typhoon	300/350	350/Max	Max
Him case I	200/250	250	300/Max
Hurricane II A or B	200	250	Max
lurricane II C	250	Max	Max
Deflant	250	300/Max	Max
Vhichwind	250	300/Max	Max
Gladiator	150/200	200	200/Max
w 190 .	Max	Max	Max
III SOW:	100	300/50	Max
3f 109F	250	300/350	Max
Bf 109G	300/Max	350/Max	Max
31 110	250	300/Max	Max
MB 152	250	300/Max	Max
520	200	250	300/Max
Hawk 75	200/250	250	Max
VIS 406	200/250	250	Max
Fitte	200ffAm	360	- Mate

CIVIL WAR GENERALS

oddly enough for a Civil War game, movement and stacking rules force most movement to be in column. The game's lack of skirmishers makes a column formation even more vulnerable than usual When your forces are defending, you can capitalize on this weakness by forcing enemy columns and artillery batteries to deploy earlier than they would like. Here, a single Confederate regiment has caused most of the Union attack column at Blackburn's Ford to deploy several hundred yards away from the crucial edge of a rise.

Artillery can't change formation and move on the same turn, so this Confederate unit can move quickly to safety. Meanwhile the main Rebel body has time to prepare a warm reception for the Yanks, once the enemy troops finally move up to the rise.





Action:

Atomic Bomberman

OFFENSIVE TIPS

- 1. Greed kills. Watch for opponents going for power-ups in short halls with one way in and no comers to hide beland. When an enemy goes for the power-up, seal him in with a single bomb
- 2. When an opponent stops to wait for a bomb

to go off, he may be vulnerable. Cauge how much time remains before the bomb explodes, and act as though you are trying to get out of the bomb's path by turning toward your opponent (who has stopped moving). Then surround him with bombs before he realizes that you are attacking and not hiding

- 3. Got lots of flame enhancements? Players on one side of the screen may not pay any mind to bombs dropped on the other side, and may risk moving an the bombs' path. Works great with the orange flame power-up.
- Jelly bombs make everyone nervous. No one knows exactly when, or, more importantly, where they are going to blow.

5. The timer is the best power-up in the game. Not just because you can set it off when people walk past it, but also because you can use it to set off other players' bombs before they are safely out of the way. Note this example: Two players are at a standoff and repeatedly run up to each other, drop a bomb, and then luck around a comer. If one has a timer, he can set his bomb off the second he is out of the way, setting the other players bomb off early. When used with the kick, this works even better. Finally, when used with the boxing

glove or the blue hand, the

timer can set off a

bomb where every-

one least expects it.



DEFENSIVE TIPS

- 1. Even if you are in a direct line from a bomb and have no way out, still run as far away as possible, you never know exactly how far the bombs reach will be.
- 2. When you're sealed in by multiple bombs on two or more sides, move first to the one dropped last. If the bombs aren't connected—and you hide from the blast of the first one—you may be able to get out of the way of the second by escaping down the path previously blocked by the first.
- 3. See a power-up you want? If it is in an easily sealed area, put a bomb in a place that will block off the area from other players, but won't seal you in at the same time. Then pick up the power-up and wait for your own bomb to go off
- 4. Plenty of obstacles between you and the nearest opponent? Sometimes you're better off blowing away your side of the screen (looking for power-ups) than charging straight for the

more bombs.

nearest enemy

5. Just startling out? Always
look for the
spot where your
bombs can hit the
most blocks.
Linking bombs (so
the flames from one bomb set
off another bomb) also helps clear
away large areas quickly—this is
very dangerous with four or

Simulations/Space

IF-16

▶ A target for a laser-guided weapon can be selected a their directly, with LANT RN or indirectly, by using the F-16's ground rader modes. Because it presents more information rader is invariably faster and easier to use. The biggest problem with using rader is that if the target moves off the rader scope, the weapon, which requires target illumination all the way till impact will lose lock. The best solution is to first designate the desired target on rader, then bring up the LANTIRN FLIR MFD mode and deactivate your rader. With rader on standby, LANTIRN's laser designator will remain trained on the correct target—even after you have overflown it.

 Cluster bombs are excellent weapons for dealing with groups of ground vehicles, but only when used correctly. Your goal should



be to generate a broad pattern of bomblets that is dense enough to kill almost every-thing within the target area. First, don't fly too fast (350-400 knots is about right) or the pattern will be too long, producing many gaps in the coverage. Second, don't trust the bombing system—it will almost always tell you to drop too early, resulting in the bomblet storm either barely reaching or even falling short of the alm point. Practice until you team how much lead-time is necessary.

▶ Gun kills in iF-16 are surprisingly easy once you learn to trust the EEGS funnel. Put a fighter-sized target near the small end in a stable turn for just a second, then hold down the trigger as you pull the bandit through the bottom of the funnel—BOOM! It works every time, even well outside the gun's normal range limit —Denny Atkin

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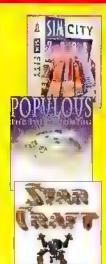
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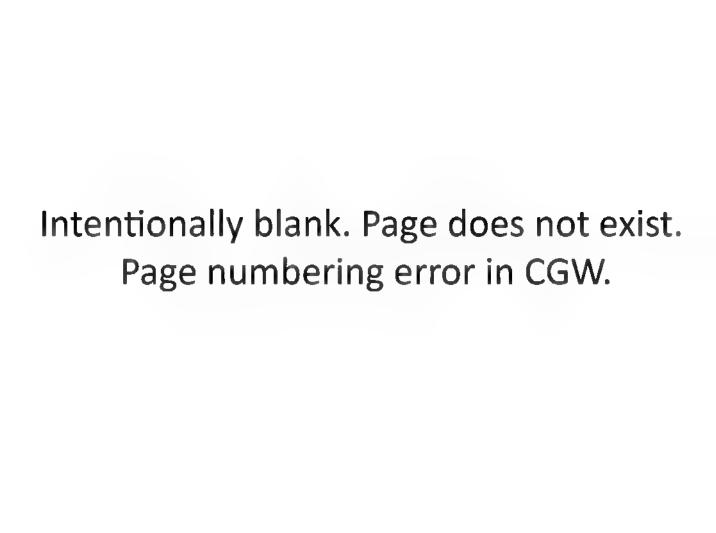


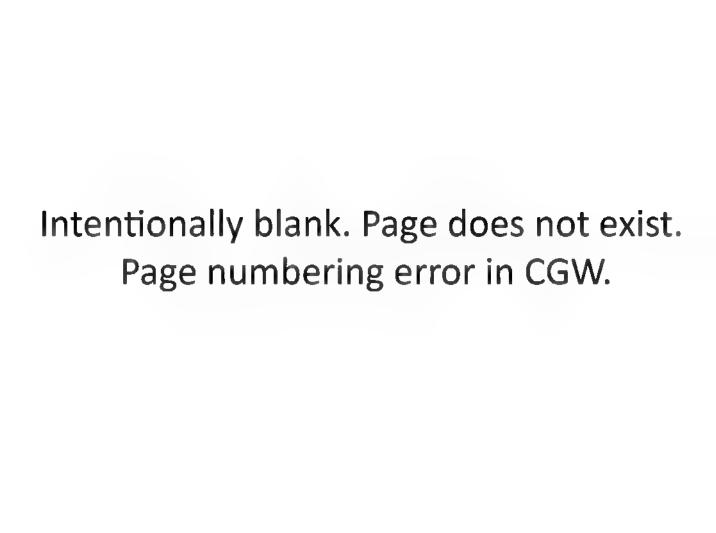




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ALONE IN THE BARK (I-Motion, 1992)

Lovecrattian norror goes 3D with shifting camera angles adding to the creepy atmosphere.

BATTLE CHESS (interplay, 1988)

The Franklin Mint of computer chess games with violent and tunny anima, ion disguising a solid chess engine.

BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR (Dynamix, 1993)

As rich and imaginative as Raymond Foist's world itself, its 3D perspective was fresh.

CHESSMASTER (Software Toolworks, 1986)

The Cadinac of castling, this chass masterplace gets belter with each version.

DUNGEON MASTER (FTL.

Software, 1987) Trend selling graphics, digitized stereo, and great hack-end-stash

from a decade ago.

DAY OF THE TENTACLE

(LucasArts, 1993) Officeat sequel to Manac Mansion, the interactive equivalent of a classic Chuck Jones cattoon.

Doom (ld Software, 1993) Revolutionized PC action games and network gaming; surpassed in technology but not gameplay

EARL WEAVER BASEBALL (EA, 1986)

Revolutionary physics-based basebail game that pleased both action and statistics fans.

EMPIRE (Interstel, 1978)

V/Will in space. This mainframe transplant brought elegant mechanics, depth, and unending replayability to the PC.

F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER (MicroProse, 1988)

A "thinking man's" sim, with great missions, in which sneaking around is as lun as doglighting.

FALCON 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByle, 1991)

Tough detailed jet sim with embitious Al, graphics, and con nectivity to match its realis in.

FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO

(Dynamix, 1993)

Physics-based system, good Al, and unmalched career play make this the ullimate in pigskin play.

GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT

(SSI, 1986)

First variable order of baltie changed the look of all

American Civil War garnes on the PC

GUNSHIP (MICROPROSE, 1989) Great character continuity, R&R for latigued pirots, and even sick leave; best chopper fare until Jane's Longeow

HARPOON (360 Pacific, 1989) In-depth modern haval battles in real-Line, based on Gold War fears

KAMPFBRUPPE (SSI, 1985)

Armorad warfare on WWI 's Eastern Front, offered engaging battles on multiple platforms.

KING'S DUEST V (Sierra On Line, 1990)

Redefined the graphic adventure with non-text based parser and VGA graphics.

LEMMINGS (Psygnosis, 1991)

The lovable cartoon Lillipulians were real-time hits on every

LINKS 386 Pro (Access Soltware, 1992) Topped the leader board in graphics and realism for

M-1 TANK PLATOON (MicroProse, 1989)

Realistic sim that properly locused on armored forma trons rather than single vehicles, good mission designs

MASTER OF MAGIC (MICROPROSE, 1994)

The almosphere and variety of Masic: The Gamering with the sophistication of Civilization.

MASTER OF ORION (MicroProse, 1993)

Remarkable diplomatic Al; deep and varied technology hee; atiens required radically different playing styles.

MECH BRIGADE (SSI, 1985)

Modern armored battles with improved KAMPFORUPPE system and more realism

MIGHT & MAGIC (New World

Computing, 1986). First person, maze-based RPG with huge environment and lough tactical combat

W.U.L.E. (EA, 1983)

A landmark multiplayer strategy game that had no weapons of destruction, just out, broat competition that made economics fun-

PANZER GENERAL (SSI, 1994)

A truly fun wargame with an elegant interface. great campaigns, strong Al. pood graphics, and impressive sound

RED BARON (Dynamix, 1990)

WWI air combat with great graphics, incredible realism, and a versable replay feature

SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION

(MicroProse, 1991)

CGW's #1-rated game of all time; indescribably addictive world conquestr

exploration game.

SID MEIER'S PIRATES (MicroProse, 1987)

Combines pirate adventure, action, 8PG, and strategy to make the most successful hybrid of all time.

SID MEIER'S RAILROAD TYCOON

(MicroProse, 1990)

SimCity meets 1830 with robber barons for emphasis.

SIMCITY (Maxis, 1987)

Urban planning with fascinating consequences and chalenges; the first great software toy.

Starflight (EA, 1986)

Depth, great characters, and a good scrill storyline set early standarús for RPGs.



THE BARD'S TALE (EA. 1985)

Pioneered three-point animation, 3D color mazes, and automapping.

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

(LucasArts, 1990) Comedy adventure that set new standards in writing quality and social sensitivity.

Their Finest Hour (LucasArls, 1989)

WWII sint with great campaigns and crew member options some current sims tack

TIE FIGHTER (LLCasArts, 1994)

Most satisfying Star Wars space-combat game to date lets you live on the dark side.

ULTIMA III (Origin Systems, 1983)

Coherency and surprising subtlety emphasized role-playing, and set the lone for later Ublews.

ULTIMA IV (Origin Systems, 1985)

High-concept RPG explored meaning of virtue and put the ROLE in role-playing

ULTIMA VI (Origin Systems, 1990)

This RPG as morality play paved way for Lictima Online's realistic environs and objects.

Unima Underworld (Origin Systems, 1992) The first truly 3D RPG, and still the most convincing: its dun-geon water were nicely "painted" with texture-mapped graphics.

War in Russia (SSI, 1984)

More realistic than Eastern Front, it captured the essence of the largest land campaign in history.

Wasteland

(Interplay, 1986) Derived from Mike Stackpo e s Mercenaries, Spios, and Private Eyes, this is the definitive postapocalyptic

WING COMMANDER I

(Origin Systems, 1990) A hot spaceflight engine, unfolding story path, and great characters.

Wing Commander H

(Origin Systems, 1991)

Darker story, gritter feel, sound card advances, and tougher Al made this a sequel of sequels.

Wing Commander III

(Origin Systems, 1994) Surprisingly satisfying FMV space opera didn'i lose the essence of the space-combat game.

Wizandry (Sir-Tech Soltware, 1981)

Defined the computer RPG with maze-based viewpoint and almospheric spell names.

Wolfenstein 3-D (ld Software, 1992)

Smooth scrolling action blastlest cleverly updated the original, and put sharevare back on the map.

X-COM (MicroProse, 1994)
Premier factical squad-level engine combined with alien tech research and pop culture for a scl-ft game nearly as addiclive as Civ.

Zork (Infocom, 1981)

The progenitor of adventure games on the PC; its humor and challenging puzzles seem limeless.

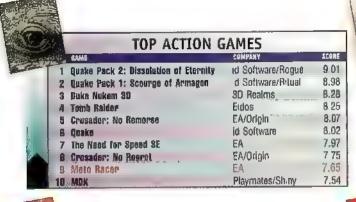




THE COMPUTER GAMING POLL

A MONTHLY SURVEY OF CGW SUBSCRIBERS

ach month, 2,000 CGW subscribers are selected at random to rate 100 computer games. The results of that poll are combined with the results of previous months to yield a cumulative average for the best plays in gaming. If you receive a ballot, please return it with your ratings so that other gamers and game publishers can benefit from your feedback.



1 1	i.				
20		7	TOP ADVENTURE	GAMES	
			- BAME	COMPANY	SCORE
100	-	1	Cabriel Knight 2	Sierra	8.21
		2	The Pandera Directive	Access	8.19
	4	3	Twinsen's Odyssey	Activision	7.87
- 1		4	Rama	Sierra	7 79
- 4	1	Ü	The Neverbood	DreamWorks	7.69
1	3	8	Realms of the Hannling	Interplay	7 62
		7	Spycraft	Activision	7.47
	1	8	Ctrcte of Blood	Virgin	7 46
		8	Full Throttle	LucasArts	7.42
		10	Lainura Suit Larry 7	Sierra	7 32

TOP CLASSIC/PUZZLE GAMES You Don't Know Jack II 8.54 Berkeley Systems 2 You Don't Know Jack Berkeley Systems 8.21 7.96 Berkeley Systems 3 You Don't Know Jack Movies Berkeley Systems 7.72 4 You Don't Know Jack Sports 7.32 5 Power Chess Slerra 7.21 8 Incredible Toops Sierra Virgin/Westwood 6.84 Молороју 677 Sterra Poker Sierra Microlorum 6.73 Mind Grind 5 94 Sega 10 Saku Saku

I		TOP SIMULATION/SPACE	COMBAT	GAMES
	Anna A	BAME	COMPANY	SCORE
7	1	Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	8 31
ľ	2	AH-84 Longbow	EA/Origin	8.12
ŀ	8	MachWarrior 2	Activision	8.06
1	4	MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries	Activision	8 04
ı	5	Silent Hunter	SSI	7.85
J.	8	U.S. Marina Fighters	EA	7 82
j	7	EF2000	Ocean	7.62
u	8	U.S. Navy Fighters	EA	7.53
1	9	Advanced Tactical Fighters	EA	7 42
	10	X-Wing ve. TiE Fighter	LucasArts	7.39

/	TOP	SPORTS GAMES	
	COME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Links LS	Access	8.66
2	NASCAR Racing 2	Slerra	8 24
3	NHL 87	EA Sports	8.10
4	Grand Prix 2	MicroProse	8 01
5	NBA Live 97	EA Sports	7,95
8	Jack Nicklaus 4	Acco ade	7 80
7	Traplaptay 98	EA Sports	7.75
B	NASCAR Racing	Serra	7.57
9	NRL Hockey 98	EA Sports	7,47 .
-	Tripleplay 97	EA Sports	7.47

		TOP STRATEGY	GAMES	
THE PERSON		EAME	COMPANY	SCORE
	1	Heroes II: Price of Loyalty	New World Computing	9.10
	2	WerCraft II Expansion Disk	Blizzard	8 85
	3	WarCraft II	Blazzard	8.75
	4	Red Alert	V _{rgin} /Westwood	8.74
١.	- 6	Heroes II	New World Computing	8.73
	8	Civilization II	MicroProse	871
	7	Red Alert: Counterstrike	Virgin/Westwood	8.38
A	8	Command & Conquer	Virgin/Westwood	8 24
	9	C&C: Covert Operations	Virgin/Westwood	8.23
	10	Civilization II: Scenarios	MicroProse	8.18

	•	TOP ROLE-PLAYING GAMES							
		GAME	COMPANY	SCORE					
1000		Clablo	Bozzard	8 70					
	2	Daggerfall	Bethesda	7 38					
		Anvil of Dawn	New World Campuling	7.12					
	4	Albion	Blue Byte	6.10					
,	5	man.							
	8	_							
3	7								
	8	_							
	9								
	10.	-							

		N.								
11			TOP WARGAMES							
80.		i	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE					
7		1	Steel Panthers II Campaign Disk	SSI	B 80					
		2	Steel Panthers Campaign Disk	SSI	8 68					
		8	Steel Panthers II	SSI	B.38					
		4	Steel Panthers	SSI	8.37					
		5	Battleground: Shilch	TalonSoft	8,13					
		8	Battleground: Boll Ron	TalonSoft	8.12					
-		7	Battleground: Napoleon in Russia	TalonSoft	8,06					
4		8	Tigers on the Prowi ii	HPS	8.02					
		9	Battleground: Antietam	TalonSoft	7.98					
		10	Battleground: Waterion	TalonSoft	7.73					

TOP 100 GAMES

		GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE		CAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
	1	Heroes II: Price of Loyalty	New World Comp.	ST	9.10	51	Battleground: Waterloo	TalonSoft	WG	7.73
ŗ	2	Quake Pack 2: Dissolution of Elernity	ad Software/Rogue	AC	9 01	52	You Don't Know Jack Sports	Berkeley Systems	CP	7 72
	3	Quake Pack 1: Scourge of Armagon	id Software/Ritual	AC	8.98	58	The Neverbood.	DreamWorks	AD	7.69
	4	WarCraft II Expansion Disk	Blizzard	ST	8.85	54	Mute Racer	EΛ	AC	7 65
Ţ	5	Steel Panthers II Campaign Disk	SSI	WG	8.80		X-COM 8	MicroProse	ST	7.65
	8	WarCraft (i	Blizzard	ST	8.75	56	EF2000	Ocean	SI	7.62
	7	Red Alert	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.74		Realms of the Haunting	Interplay	AD	7.62
	8	Heroes II	New Wor & Comp	ST	8 73	58	Jagged Alliance: Deadly Games	Sir-Tech	ST	7 59
	9	Civilization II	MicroProse	ST	8.71	59	NASCAR Racing	Sierra	SP	7.57
r	10	Diable	Blizzard	RP.	8.70	80	Decisive Battles of WWII: Ardennes	SSI/SSG	WG	7 55
	11	Steel Panthers Campaign Disk	SSI	WG	8 68	81	Battlepround: Gattysburg	TalonSoft		7.54
7	12	Links LE	Access	SP	8.66		MDK	Playmates/Shiny		7 54
Ţ	18	You Don't Know Jack II	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.54	68	U.S. Navy Fighters	EA		7.53
	14	Red Alert: Counterstrike	Virgin/Westwood	ST	8.38	64	Interstate '78	Activision		7 50
		Steel Panthers D	SSI	WG	8.38	85	Pacific General	SSI		7.49
	16		SSI	WG	8.37	88	NHL Hockey 96	EA Sports	AC SI AC WG SP AD SP AD ST SI ST AD AC SP SI ST AD AC SP SI ST ST AD AC SP SI ST ST AD AC SP SI	7.47
	17	Wing Commander IV	EA/Origin	SI	8.31	-	Spycraft	Activision		7.47
Ì	18		3D Realms	AC	8 28		Tripleplay 97	EA Sports		7.47
	19	Tomb Raider	Eidos	AC	8.25	89	Directs of Blood	Virgin		
	20		Virg n/Westwood	ST	8 24	70	Lards of the Realm II			7.46
	LU		Sierra	SP	8.24	70		Sierra		7.43
	22		Virg n/Westwood	ST	8.23	7.1	Advanced Vactical Fighters	EA		7,42
	28	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	AD	8.21		CivNet	MicroProse	-	7 42
	FD	· ·		CP			Fantosy General	SSI		7.42
	26		Berkeley Systems		8.21	po	Full Throttie	LucasArts		7.42
	26		Access	AD CT	8.19		The Need for Speed	EA		7,42
	27		MicroProse	ST	8 18	76	NBA Live 90	EA Sports		7.40
		Battleground: Shiloh	TalonSoft	WG	B 13	77	X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter	LucasArts		7.39
	28		EA/Origin	SI	8.12	78	Daggerfall	Bettresda		7.38
	20		TalonSoft	WG	8.12	79	888(I) Hunter/Killer	EA/Jane's		7.37
	30		EA Sports	SP	8.10	1	FPS Faotball Pro '88	Sierra	SP	7 37
	81		EA/Origin	AC	8 07	81	Robert E. Lee: Civil War General	Sierra	WG	7.34
	82		TalonSoft	WG	8 06	82	Comanche 8	NovaLogic	SI	7 32
			Activision	SI	8.06		Leisure Sult Larry 7	Sierra	AD	7.32
	84		Activis on	SI	8 04		Power Chess	Sierra	CP	7.32
	36		ld Software	AC	8.02	85	Extreme Assault	Biue Byte	AC	7.31
			HPS	WG	8.02	1	PGA Your Golf 486	EA Sports	SP	7.31
	37		MicroProse	SP	8.015	P	PGA Tour Pro	EA Sports	SP	7.31
	38	_	TalonSoft	WG	7.98	88	FP8 Football Pro '97	Sierra	SP	7.30
	38		EA	AC	7.97	88	FIFA 97	EA Sports	SP	7.28
	40	You Don't Know Jack Movies	Berkeley Systems	CP	7.96		Tony LaRussa 3	Stormfront	SP	7.28
	41	NBA Live 97	EA Sports	SP	7.95	81	Last Express	Broderbund	AD	7 27
	42	Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Comp	ST	7 87	92	Age of Rifles Compaign Disk	SSI	WG	7 26
		Twinsen's Odyssey	Activision	AD	7.87	98	System Shock	EA	AC	7.23
	44	Dungson Keeper	EA/Builfrog	ST	7.86	94	Incredible Toons	Sierra	CP	7.21
	45	Silent Hunter	SSI	Sì	7.85	95	Lighthouse	Slerra	AD.	7.20
	48	U.S. Marine Fighters	EA	ŜI	7.82	1	Magic the Gathering	MicroProse	ST	7.20
	47	Jack Nicklaus 4	Accolade	SP	7.80	97	Privateer: the Darkening	Origin	Sł	7.17
	48	Rama	Sierra	AD	7.79	80	Descent II	Interplay	AC	7.16
	48	Crasader: No Regret	E.A/Ongin	AC	7 75		Theme Hospital	EA/Bullfrog	ST	7 16
		Tripleplay 98	EA Sports	SP	7.75	6	Virtual Pool	Interplay	SP	7.16

Games on unnumbered lines are Led with game on line above 🖈 - Top game of type Red New Game AD = Adventure, RP = Role-Playing SI = Simulation/Space Combal, ST Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action SP = Sports, CP = Classic/Puzzle Games are retired after two years and become eligible for the Hall of Fame

What's the Deal With...the Wrong Lessons?

e're reveling in the tradilional fall quarter frenzy as I write this, with title after fille vying to be the hot new thing, or, more accurately, trying to successfully clone

what made last year's hit the hot thing it was. While it's useless to bemoan the lack of originality in computer games (or movies, books, or cars) in this demographically driven society, what never ceases to amaze me is the utter inability of some portions of the industry to buy a clue, even when the truth is staring them in the face.

Just look at the Doom bandwagon jumping. I mean. Doom was huge for pretty much two reasons; multiplayer capability and creepy game environments. Now, it's pretty safe to say that the industry has gotten the message about network and Internet capability-even LucasArts has added it to Jedi Kwight (though by ignoring colop multiplay they stuppornly refuse to complete the picture). But the real genius of Doom was shown in its moody atmosphere (who can forget their first sight of those four demon fords staked to the walls? You just knew some serious bad mojo was about to go down...), its coherent sound (the heavy breathing of monsters just on the other side of the door), and Is truly chaotic battlefields (with foes that would go plood-crazy and will everything in their path). But what's really laughable is that executives, and even some designers, looked at that genius and the lesson they learned was "Duh...gamers want more blood and more Salan."

The result is no surprise; a horde of forgettable games that did little except generate some really stupid ads. If it weren't for games such as HEXEN, which tried to improve upon the game environment, I would have sworn that the letters D-O-O-M created some sort of lobotomizing neurological feedback in anybody high up enough in a game company to make design calls.

The wackiness doesn't end there...What lesson did the industry get from Tome Raider? "Garners wanna see big, 3D breasts!"

lesson did the industry get from Tomb Raider? 'Gamers wanna see big, 3D breasts!' ??

Another great "wrong answer" making its way through the industry is that the huge sales numbers for console games have nothing to do with the fact that the game systems cost less than \$200. Instead, the powers that be have decided that it must be because carindge games are pretty and simple...that must be what gamers want! They assume that if they have a computer game that is indistinguishable from a cartridge game, and does away with a i that annoying potential a keyboard

can give you, it will sell the same number of copies as the cartridge game. Of course, it doesn't occur to any of them that when you have just spent \$3,000 on a rig, you are looking for something a lit tile more in-depth than jumping for coins. (Those of us who actually paid money for Utrima Vill, feel free to mutter bitterly at this point.)

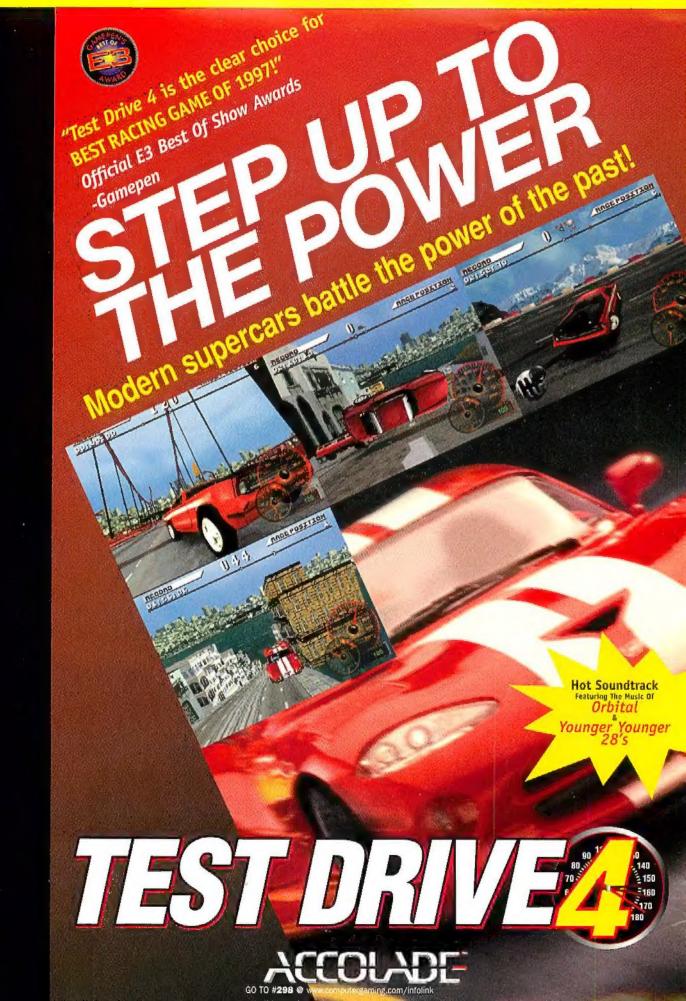
This whole "PC gamers crave simplicity" detusion is staging a strong battle on the real-time front as well. I cannot pelieve that the guys at SSI (who gave the okay for DARK COLONY) could have come away from Command & Conquer thinking, "That's it! The key to real-time wargaming is a limited number of units, no brainer base building, and some really incoherent and violent animated cut scenes!" Nobody says your designs have to embody originality every time a new one hits the page, but for the love of Xerox, at least try to clone the good parts. I can only pray that somebody out there is busy right now gicking out the best aspects of DARK REIGN, Total Annihilation and the whole research/ design engine from WAR INC. Unfortunately, I suspect that, instead, somebody in a sharp suit is showing a screenshot from Conquest Earth to a roomful of hornfied programmers while saying, "This is the direction we need to go on this project."

And of course, there isn't even a point in going into all the wrong answers that game companies brought away from the whole Myst experience.

Are salaries paid in inverse proportion to competency in this industry? Maybe it's our fault. C'mon, own up to it out there! Are you secretly turning in feedback cards, written in crayon, that say "Orgo not like game...make brain hard with complexity and my guy not punch out spleens"? After all, there has to be some reason that companies keep learning the wrong lessons from the right games. Se

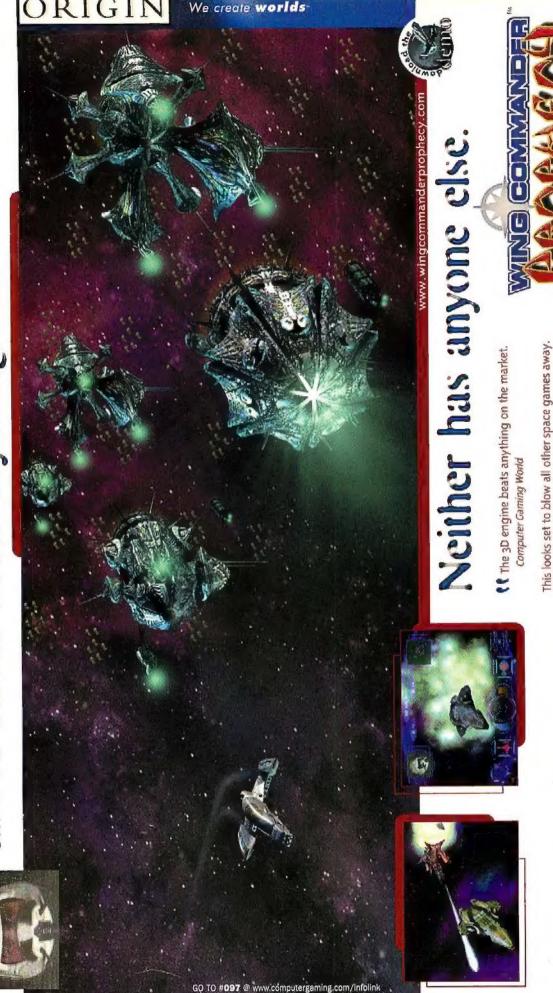
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